

OUTCASTS

A Players Guide to Pariahs



THE WORLD OF
DARKNESS

A World of Darkness:

Orcs

A Players Guide to Pariahs

Exiles from Our Fathers' Land

*But as for me, I am a worm, and no man:
a very scorn of men, and the out-cast of the people.*
— Prayer Book

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Special Thanks

Mark "Brooklyn Bridge" Rein•Hagen for buying all that virtual real estate.
Stewart "No Quarter" Wieck for what he'll do to whoever took his quarters.
Steve "Legendary Leadership" Wieck for winning the moot vote with the printers.
Rob "Changeling" Hatch for changing his mind.
Michelle "Cow Patty" Prahler for dog obedience philosophy.
Kim "Brash" Shropshire for her savvy ad placement.
Staley "The Cloister" Krause for her isolationist office.
Erin "Weaver-tainted" Kelly for training the Wyld out of her dog.
David "Field of Screams" Remy for playing ball in the parking lot.
Scott "Barney Rubble" Cohen for his Stone Age ways.



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PRINTED IN THE USA.

Orcs

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She-Who-Walks-Alone

The howling echoed through the dark woods. Jack Hanson sat up. His instincts took over, and he rolled back to his feet, moving on again. Surely, this was hell.

He'd had enough trouble accepting that vampires were real. Being one didn't make the acceptance much easier. But werewolves? No, sir, he didn't like that one bit. Worse than that, they wanted him dead. He'd done nothing to them, but they definitely did not want him in their woods. No more than the prince of Seattle had liked the idea of a new vampire in his territory.

The woods were almost completely black, but his eyes had gone through changes since he'd been Embraced. Jack could see everything as clearly as if the sun were blazing above him. That was good, but the sounds of his pursuers were starting to drive him a little crazy.

Frustrated and tired, he finally decided to try something other than just running overland. He scurried up a tree. He thought, *Bears can't climb trees. Maybe monsters can't either.*

From his new vantage point, Jack could see the beasts he was running from with more clarity than he'd really wanted. They were huge, four towering mountains of fur and claws. He could almost feel their frustration as they hunted for him. The woods, normally noisy even this late in the evening, were silent but for the panting growls of the creatures below. He was glad for the absence of his heart-beat. Even that little sound might well have given him away.

One of them spoke, guttural and stilted, "He's gone into the trees. That, or the earth swallowed him."

Jack wrapped his arms around the thick trunk of the pine he'd climbed and froze. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the leader of the group looking directly up to where he rested. Any second now, the call would go out, and they'd all see where he was.

Please, God, he thought, don't let them see me. The thought became his mantra, an endless stream of prayer that focused on surviving the next few hours. Not breathing, not moving, just waiting them out.



Ten minutes later, the werewolves gave up in disgust. He'd managed to hide from them after all. Despite his relief, he stayed motionless for another few minutes, counting the seconds off in his head. When he finally risked moving, he noticed that his hands had taken on a texture and color identical to the tree.

Two nights later, almost a hundred miles away from where he'd learned that he could camouflage himself, Jack met another werewolf.

Hungry and lonely, he'd spent the last four nights on the run and had yet to find anything that would stay in his stomach except human blood. When he saw the woman sitting by herself in the halo of a campfire, he approached, partly for the companionship but also because his stomach demanded sustenance. Even the rabbit roasting on the fire smelled good, despite the certain knowledge that even trying to eat it would send wracking waves of pain through his stomach.

Long before he actually came to the fire, the woman had seen him. She stared into the darkness and watched him move forward. She said nothing as he entered the rim of the firelight. Her face was set, wary and waiting for whatever actions he might take. To show his peaceful intentions, he raised his hands above his head.

"I don't mean any harm. But it's cold out here. I was wondering if I could share your fire."

When she spoke in response, Jack realized that she was much younger than he'd first assumed. "Yeah. You can join me. Just don't get any ideas. I'm tougher than I look." He thanked her, and they sat in silence near the comforting blaze.

The girl pulled her dinner from its makeshift spit and set it on a tin plate from her backpack. When she offered a portion to him, Jack simply shook his head. He watched her eat, mesmerized by the blood that pulsed beneath her tan skin and by the play of her muscles as she chewed and swallowed. The two diamond studs she wore in her left ear and the three golden hoops she wore in her right caught the fire's glow and reflected it back with a vengeance.

"How long have you been that way?" she asked.

"What way?" The question startled him. It took him a second to realize what she meant.

"You've got no heartbeat. You don't breathe. How long have you been a Leech?"

"I'm not a leech. I'm a vampire." He took offense at the comment. Being compared to a blood-sucking slug did nothing for his self-esteem.

"Same difference. You both eat blood." She looked at him, and he could see she was amused by his reaction.

Finally, unable to think of anything witty or profound to say in return, Jack shrugged and answered, "About three months. I don't recommend it, by the way. Being dead stinks."

"I thought vampires were undead."

"Whatever. I'd still avoid it." The hunger pangs were growing stronger, and Jack hated the part of him that was seriously considering just jumping at the girl and taking what he needed.

"I've got another rabbit over here. The blood's not warm or anything, but if it'll do you some good, you're welcome to it." He accepted eagerly, drinking the cold, pale imitation of his usual fare with gusto. It did little to slake his thirst.

He clenched his fists and sat again, ignoring the way her blood seemed to call to him. After a few more minutes, she held out her hand. When he looked closely, he could see the vein of her wrist, a pale blue line beneath her skin. "Drink what you need, but don't take too much."

"I... I don't want to hurt you." He hesitated, but she continued to hold out her wrist patiently. He forced himself not to haul her over by the collar. Instead, he placed his mouth to the vein and bit as gently as he could, savoring the taste of her offering. She hissed after his first swallow, but stayed where she was.

After a few moments, he licked the small wound on her wrist and leaned back. He was both grateful and confused. "Thank you."

She shrugged. "We've all got to eat." She looked at him for a moment, and he studied her in return. She wasn't beautiful, but she was pretty. Her hair was wild and windblown, and her face was almost too muscular. The way she carried herself was unusual too, almost too confidant for one so young. It wasn't a strut or affected; more like an unconscious, almost predatory gait. "Are you the one they were chasing?"

"The one who was chasing?"

"The pack up north of here. The werewolves."

"Yes. How did you know about that?"

"I've got very good ears."

"No one's got ears that good."

"Well, let's just say you and I have been running in the same direction." She looked away from him, her disappointment obvious.

"What have you been running from?"

"Not from. To." She tossed a small pile of kindling onto the fire, watching as the sticks caught and ignited. "I thought you were another Ronin."

"Another what?"

"Ronin. Outcast Garou." The tone of her voice and the expression of sadness on her face revealed the simple need in her words. "I thought you were another one like me."

They sat in silence again, listening to the sounds of the late night forest. When Jack spoke again, he answered the feeling behind her words, not the words themselves. "Yeah. I've been lonely too." The girl turned back to him and smiled hesitantly. In that moment, they became friends.

Her name was Nancy Madison. She explained that, until a month earlier, she'd had a second name, a special title bestowed upon her by the other werewolves. She had been called Claw-Of-Gaia, a name granted her as a reward for her ferocity in battle. When she was expelled from the Garou, they took her name and their company with it.

A few nights after that, when Jack and Nancy had learned a bit more of each other, and Jack felt safe asking, he finally questioned her about her solitary existence. "Why did they give you the boot?"

"The Garou?" She frowned, shaking her hair back from where it fell in her eyes. They stared at each other in silence for several seconds, until she finally shrugged. "They don't hold to the same beliefs as me. I like the city."

"Won't float. You already told me there are two tribes living in the cities."

"Yeah. But they don't agree with my lifestyle."

"Why not?"

"You're damned pushy, Jack."

"Why not? I told you my story. What's so bad about yours that we can't talk it over?"

"Okay." Nancy squared her shoulders, staring at him defiantly. "I like doing a few illegal drugs from time to time. The Garou say that makes me 'tainted by the Wyrm.' They say I can't go back until I straighten out my act."

"That's bullshit. I've never once seen you take any drugs. And I've fed off you enough times I'd know if you were."

"So maybe I don't do the drugs anymore. You ever think about that?"

"So why not go back to them?"

Nancy was silent for a long time. Her dark eyes stared off into the distance at something that Jack could not see. But the anguish in her voice when she spoke again was deep and wounding. "I'm afraid they'd turn me away. I don't want to be alone, Jack. I can't stand being alone."

He reached out with his cold, lifeless hand and squeezed her warm, vital one gently. "You won't be alone. You have me."

They spoke no more for the rest of the night.

Just as Jack learned of Nancy, she came to know more of him. They traveled together, staying mostly in the woods and always moving at night. As they walked, they told each other about the lives they'd once had and about the odd beliefs of their unique peoples. The werewolves fought to save the world from a force called the Wyrm. If that meant killing humans and destroying cities, so be it. The Garou seemed to hate the cities and all they represented, though there were a few exceptions. The vampires seemed only to want their own privacy and to feast on the humans among whom they lived. The Kindred wished to make certain the cities lasted forever and to ensure that people were always present. More people meant a better supply of food.



Jack and Nancy agreed that both groups had valid reasons for what they wanted, but even more so, both seemed far too extreme in their behavior and beliefs. They discussed politics and religion, music and movies they'd enjoyed. As time went on, they became integral parts of each other's lives. When loneliness seized the heart of one, the other was there to lend comfort. When the ghosts of his past came to haunt Jack, Nancy was there to dispel the fears and anger. He returned the favor eagerly.

Naturally, Fate moved to separate them.

After half a year of moving among the small towns and living off the land, Jack and Nancy ran across a situation that neither could ignore. Nancy went a little crazy. For three nights she was short-tempered, answering only in terse responses. On the fourth night, they almost came to blows when Jack tried to get Nancy to speak of what troubled her. Her only answer made no sense to him at the time, but later he understood its meaning. "You're changing Jack. You're not who you were when we met." The sorrow in her voice was tainted with accusatory notes of betrayal.

Jack woke on the fifth night to find that his long-time companion was nowhere around. Several hours of searching proved fruitless. They were deep in the Farm Belt at the time, where the humans lived in harmony with the earth. While Nancy was away, Jack learned to understand what the prince of Seattle had warned him about. He learned just why the Kindred referred to themselves as the Damned.

On the third night of solitude, just an hour or so before the sunrise sent Jack back into the cold ground, he found a solitary woman feeding chickens near a farm. Her hair was still damp from her morning shower, and steam rose from her body in the chill morning air. For one moment only, he looked at the woman with a man's eyes, admiring her earthy beauty and the sound of her voice as she sang fragments of a song he'd never heard before. Then his hunger came back, and the time he'd spent living on the blood of animals fueled the demons in his soul into an orgy of rage.

He vaguely remembered the sound of the woman's voice as she saw him approaching. He was aware that she'd started to scream before he covered her mouth with his hand and sank his teeth into her neck. Then he could only drift in the warm red tides of her fading life.

He slept that day as he had seldom slept before — peacefully. Only after he had once again dragged himself from the ground did he really think about what he had done. The word that tore through his mind was *murder*. He'd killed an innocent woman to fuel the filthy desires of his body. Worst of all, he'd enjoyed it.

The next two nights were spent hiding deep in the woods, shaking with terror over what he'd become. On the third night he ventured forth again, determined only to drink from a cow in a nearby field. Though he managed to drink the bovine's blood and keep it down, it held no special thrill like that of the farm girl he'd taken by force. He drank his fill, but when he went to sleep with the morning's light, he was still hungry.

During the time Nancy was away, almost a month by Jack's reckoning, he consumed the blood of seven people. Two of them lived to remember the incident. Unknown to Jack, one of the survivors was Kinfolk to the Garou.

They came in the daylight hours, seven strong. The beasts dragged him from the soil and pinned him to the ground. Savage faces stared down at him as the sun burned the eyes from his skull. The last sound he heard was the growl of satisfaction that spilled from one of the beast's lips. The last sight he laid his eyes on was the too-familiar form of one Garou who wore two diamond studs in her left ear and three golden hoops in her right. His heart broke one last time before the life was seared from his body.

Nancy stared down at the ground where Jack's ashes rested. Her head was low, and her face wore an expression Jack would have recognized. She was lonely. Too damned alone for anyone's good.

"I loved you, Jack," she whispered, low enough so that her brethren could not hear. "I really did. But you just couldn't leave well enough alone. You kept telling me again and again that I should go back to my people."

She scraped his ashes together and poured them into a jar. Her eyes burned with tears, but nothing compared to the burning knot in her heart.

When she'd gathered the ashes together, she closed the jar and slipped it into her knapsack. The time had come to move on. She had miles to go before she would be home again.

"They said I could come back. But first I had to bring proof of my battle against the Wyrm." She shook her head angrily, tossing the mane of hair away from her eyes with the same gesture that Jack himself had come to love so much. "You should have stayed away from the humans. I'd have fed you forever, Jack. I would've been good to you."

The tears she'd fought so hard to avoid rained down. She let them fall. She had no strength left to contain the sorrow.

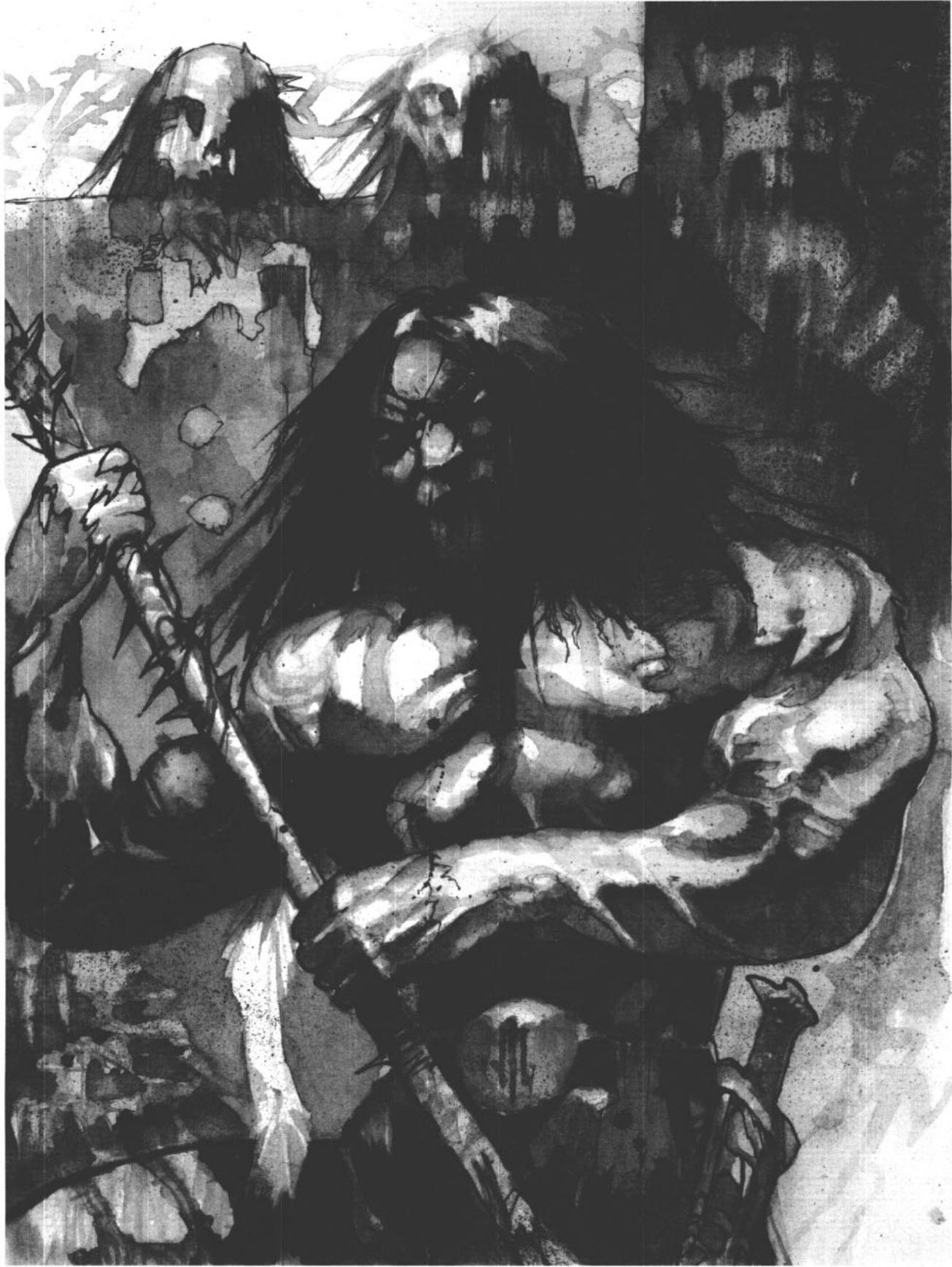
The last words she held inside, because some truths are harder to speak than others. The Garou always surrendered to their beast-side and, in so doing, maintained their sanity. But the Kindred had to fight against their personal demons or fall victim to them. The two could never stay together for very long. Association meant accepting that the differences between their races were far too great to ever overlook.

Nancy started walking. As she moved, she changed. It was a human girl who started the long trek to the woods of Washington state. It was a Garou who finished the journey. In time, she gained the right to run with her tribe again. She earned a new name and great honor in the eyes of her people. The leaders of her sept praised her ferocity in battle and her almost-suicidal bravery. She was even fiercer than before her exile.

No one ever realized that her real desire was to join her one true love in final death.

Although she'd given over the jar which held Jack's ashes, she kept a very small medicine bag full of his remains around her neck, a reminder that once, she'd lived away from her people and known peace. Perhaps even happiness.

On many nights, when the battles were over for a time and the sept celebrated its hard-won victories, Nancy stayed away from the festivities, preferring instead to live up to the name she'd sold her soul to earn: She-Who-Walks-Alone.



Introduction: The One and the Many

*Abandoned by the Promised Land
Set sail on your own
How much longer will the well
Be dry for those who roam*
— Driving and Crying, “Honeysuckle Blues”

There is little room in this world for outsiders. The world demands conformity, docile sheep following a handful of leaders. Individuality is wrong. Self-expression is flawed and stops people from achieving unity. As a result, there is violence against the unique. Homosexuals are assaulted out of fear and outrage, religious minorities are persecuted as heathens, free-thinkers are punished for their eccentricity. The philosophy is simple enough: If you act or believe differently than the masses, there must be something wrong with you. If you do not conform, you

risk a life of grief and pain. The question arises: Is disagreeing with the majority rule worth all the trouble it causes?

Surely it is easier to simply agree with your brethren, to run with the pack without the need to struggle alone. Is individuality worth the stigma of being outcast? Are the values you hold precious worth the cost of security and comfort tossed to the wind? Isn't it easier to hide your shame and be one with the flock? Wouldn't your life be easier if you tossed away your foolish convictions and became another faceless member of the “in” crowd?



This is a decision every person must make at one time or another. There is no single person in the world who conforms with every belief that is accepted as right by the ruling parties. There is no one person who completely reflects the general consensus. We decide day by day whether or not we will follow the rules set forth by our forebears and by the powers that be. That is our freedom, our right and our duty. But what happens if we say "no" when asked if we believe that God in Heaven is the only truth? What fate awaits us if we are the only ones who feel that abortion should be a matter of choice and not a sin against humanity? What happens if we're born with a withered limb or a third eye? Perhaps nothing, because we may still agree with everyone on everything else. Maybe we'll still be accepted if we just don't tell anyone the truth about how we feel.

Can you live that way? Can you accept that your beliefs are less valid than the beliefs of those around you? Can you surrender your dreams because they are not socially acceptable? Will you tolerate the jeers and admonitions of the people around you because you dress differently? Or will you change your dressing habits to conform with the image of what everyone wants you to be? What if, even after you have tried again and again, you still aren't accepted? What happens if you can't follow the leaders, despite the threat of punishment if you don't conform?

The mob truly does rule. History teaches that, if nothing else. At least, their history does. But there have always been a few individuals who decided the mob was wrong. These individuals have left their mark on the world, sometimes even causing the majority to reconsider what has always been accepted as "right" or "wrong." The usual cost to these radicals was a span of time when they were not accepted, a few years when they were outcasts — pariahs. Or, in many cases, they suffered a lifetime spent on the periphery of society. What is perceived by the majority as a waste of time was worth ostracism to these nonconformists.

But for some, the cost has been much higher. The price they paid for their individuality was death. The strongest have caused the world to change anyway, forcing the society that shunned them to reconsider what is important and what is acceptable. For those few, their philosophy or their individuality was worth the loss of their life.

In the World of Darkness, this conflict between the individual and society, the puppet and his masters, is much more extreme. While these viewpoints are debated in our world, they are fought in bloody battles in the World of Darkness.

Each culture has a different name for their outcasts. The Garou call them Ronin; the Kindred call them Caitiff; and the Awakened call them Orphans and Hollow Ones. In some cases, the way these outcasts chose to live their lives was the cause of their exile. In others, it is something about them that makes them "different." These cultures all suffer the same flaw: They believe that the individual who refuses to blindly follow their rules is a troublemaker. They feel that those who refuse their culture are somehow unclean. (Even among the Garou, who have their Ragabash, societal rebellion must be condoned by a moon auspice. Lack of the auspice means rebellion is not allowed.)

The outcasts, of course, see this matter differently. And herein is the cause of their rebellion or exile.

This book is designed to allow you to play an outcast in the World of Darkness. The rules are a little different here, because Ronin cannot earn Renown in the same ways legitimate tribe members can. Caitiff cannot hope for prestige among their clan members, and Hollow Ones are practically ignored by the Traditions. There are ways around these problems. But the rules change when you stand alone in the World of Darkness.



Book One: Caitiff

The Sins of Our Sires

Round here we're carving out our names

Round here we all look the same

Round here we talk like lions

but we sacrifice like lambs

— Counting Crows, “Round Here”

I never wanted the Embrace. I never wanted immortality or these bizarre powers. I just wanted to live. When I told the girl about my cancer, I just wanted an ear to bend while I tried to drown my sorrows with a dozen Seagrams and Seven-Ups. That's okay. I know she meant well.

But she abandoned me, left me to find out about my new existence on my own. The only warning she gave me was to stay away from the sunlight unless I wanted to burn to a crisp. She never told me about the clans or the

Camarilla, or about the rules that exist to stop Kindred from creating more of us. They let me live, lucky me. My sire died for her mistake, left to roast slowly as the sun came up, her death recorded on video tape as a warning to anyone else who wanted to have pity on a dying human without first asking permission.

I understand that she was a Gangrel, but I'm a Caitiff. There was no one to teach me how to be a Gangrel, and I never learned. Despite the wanderlust which fills most Gangrel, I chose to stay in the city where I was comfortable and where I still had friends. Maybe everything would have worked out if I hadn't developed Disciplines that belonged to other clans. My love of magic and the occult drew me naturally towards necromancy. How was I to know that the Tremere would take offense at my learning these secrets without a teacher? Granted, I wasn't very good at it; everything I learned I picked up from a dozen books on magic and magical theory, but they still didn't like the idea of someone outside their own clan knowing how to cast a spell. Jealous, secretive bastards.



Pressure mounted to call a Blood Hunt against me. The Tremere claimed that I had diablerized one of their own to learn their secrets. Then the Toreador joined them, both claiming that my aura bore the taint of diablerie. Prince Lodin called the Blood Hunt, and I surely would have died, had he not decided to warn me of his decision in advance. I fled the city and did my best to find a safe haven in another town.

I changed my name, lying about who my sire was and claiming that I was of Clan Brujah. I hoped my false claims would allow me the security of a clan membership. Within a month, the Brujah learned of my lies, and I was forced to flee again.

In Seattle I tried posing as a Malkavian. The end result was the same. Even the insane Kindred didn't want me. I was Caitiff, weak-blooded.

During my lonely travels, I'd heard of another place, the Anarch Free States, a place where the Camarilla did not rule, and where all Kindred were accepted as equals. I didn't walk to Los Angeles and the Free States — I ran.

It's easier to find acceptance and some semblance of life here. I am still Caitiff, but that isn't held against me so strongly. There is still bias against the clanless, even with so many others like me in the area. But we join together from time to time, reveling in the freedom to walk without fear of destruction. It's a start.

Life Among the Unwanted

The following files were liberated from the haven of Claudius Maximus, fiend of Clan Tremere, and are made available to you courtesy of Horace Slater, Lorekeeper of Chatamauga Warren. Note please that certain portions of this work required translation and that not all of the translations are guaranteed to be accurate.

In my studies of the various clans, I have come across numerous references to the "weak-blooded," or clanless Caitiff. The Caitiff are indeed a most unusual case and one which I find fascinating. Despite the rumors that these non-aligned Kindred are allegedly weaker than the other clans, I have run across references to at least 15 who were strong enough not only to create new vampiric Disciplines, but to actually transfer their new abilities to their progeny.

One could almost believe that the Caitiff were actually more powerful than any of the clans, which in turn leads me to wonder if the clanless Kindred might be responsible for several of the numerous bloodlines which have started presenting themselves. Personally, I prefer the idea that the bloodlines are simply the remains of various clans destroyed during the fall of the Second City, but there could be some potential for manipulation and vampiric breeding if the

Caitiff are indeed capable of spawning new bloodlines. However, I should point out that most of the Caitiff are so far removed from Caine that the Disciplines they create are weak and rarely ever have the chance to become fully developed, as their creators are very secretive and refuse to admit that they have created previously unheard of powers. Worse still, some of the Caitiff I have studied refused to acknowledge that the Disciplines they have created can be learned, as if they simply divined the ability and then taught themselves to expand on what they claim came to them instinctively. The very concept that Disciplines can be created simply by thought is ludicrous, but also has ramifications which are mind-numbing.

One of the Caitiff I captured swore to me under extreme duress that her sire was of the Nosferatu, despite the lack of any malformations or the usual characteristics one can expect to find in members of that hideous clan. The woman actually claimed that she was driven out of her hometown — Paris, Texas, to be precise — because the Nosferatu were repulsed by her lack of deformity. Such are the stories the hapless and shamefully useless Caitiff create to make themselves seem a part of our society. Still, how pathetic that she could not at least pick the name of a legitimate clan with which to associate herself.

Following this introduction, I have enclosed a substantial transcript from a Caitiff who claims that she has existed as a vampire for the last eight centuries, and that she is only five times removed from Caine. Despite an awesome display of power, a strong sense of history from the Kindred perspective and her fluent knowledge of over 40 languages and 300 dialects, I have trouble believing that the lady is what she claims. Just the same, I have studied her carefully and made note of her unusual abilities in the hopes that I can completely disprove her claims at a later time.

Another claims that he was once a human being, changed not by the Embrace, but by experiments conducted by none other than members of my own clan. He swears no fluids were placed in his body and that he was given no foods either. The vampire simply looked at him and uttered a few words. Utter rubbish, of course. Were such feats possible, I'm certain that no member of the Tremere would use them to create Caitiff. The clanless are, simply put, mistakes.

The following transcription comes from a series of questions posed to an acknowledged Caitiff named Dr. Solomon Grey, case study number 47. He claims that he was Embraced by a member of Clan Ventrule, and this does not surprise me in the least. He is certainly as full of himself as the average Ventrule. The good doctor, by the way, also claims extensive research into the history and traditions of the Caitiff.



BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

They don't listen well. The Ventru, the Toreador, even the Brujah are so set in their ways that they refuse to acknowledge any potential uses for the Caitiff. But that's their problem, not mine. My problem is they won't even acknowledge our right to exist among them, except as second-class citizens.

They forget that no one asks to be Caitiff.

I used to think that being a vampire would be the epitome of it all, something which was an honor and a privilege. I had no idea these bastards could be so human in the way they act. When I was growing up, McCarthy kept the country safe from the godless Communists by knocking on doors and questioning anyone who was different from the norm. By different, I mean the color of their skin, the religious beliefs they followed and the habits they enjoyed. Christ help you if you were Jewish or Muslim, and be very polite if your skin was not white enough for the neighbors. When I started hanging around with the vampires, I thought they'd be different; from what the ones I'd met had told me, even sex didn't matter. All were all equal under the curse of Caine. Damnation was a sort of salvation as I saw it.

What can I say about getting Embraced? It beat the hell out of fighting for the old American values in a place with villages whose names I couldn't pronounce, even if Elvis was supposedly fighting the good fight over there in Korea. It just wasn't for me, so I faked my own death in a car wreck and received the Embrace instead of going off to fight the godless Chinese or whoever. We all make mistakes.

Everything was fine at first. All of the Kindred I met were decent enough, even the Nosferatu. They were ugly as sin, but kind enough once you got past the smell and the way they looked. It wasn't until the clan discovered I was "weak-blooded" that I started having troubles. Here I was, perfectly willing to serve the prince and the elders, even content to live under the stifling rules they threw at me, and all I got for my troubles was "Sorry, but we don't like your kind here in Denver. Perhaps you'd be happier in a place with more people." Even Mistrina, my own sire, couldn't stand the sight of me.

(I must interject in this transcription at this point. Despite the claims of Dr. Grey, most of the Caitiff I've run across had absolutely no idea as to who their sires were. It is my profound belief that this lack of training on the parts of the sires is directly responsible for the weak blood of the clanless. With no one to teach them any Disciplines, I believe they simply learn by example. They mimic the abilities they see other Kindred use and often learn by viewing numerous different examples. One associate of mine, Karl Schreckt, believes that most of these pathetic creatures actually learn their Disciplines as a result of whatever fiction they've read that relates to vampires. I believe his studies might actually have some merit.)

It wasn't really a choice. I could live elsewhere or die in the Mile High City. I'm sort of addicted to living, so I ran. Have you ever tried to get a new prince in a new city to accept you when you tell the truth? It may work fine for the clans, but the theory falls apart when you're Caitiff. Boulder didn't want me, Aspen was full up. "Sorry, and have a nice day." I finally got permission to hang around in Las Vegas, but only after I swore fealty to the Giovanni. They didn't seem to mind having a few extra Kindred around, as long as the new Kindred followed with the party beliefs.

Giovanni are interesting in that way. Me and three other Caitiff were given jobs as enforcers and paid a decent amount of money in addition to the right to hang around in town, so long as we took care of some of the less tasteful work, like burying the bodies where the capos told us to and keeping our mouths shut. With some of the clans, normally the ones that are outside of the Camarilla, you can make a decent living and still tell the truth about yourself. Hell, I understand the Sabbat'll take you in as well – at least, they say they will. But I've heard from others that what the Sabbat promises and what it delivers are two different things.

After 15 years of being the Goodfellas for the Giovanni, we were given the opportunity to join with the clan in a more formal way, with Blood Bonds and promises that we would never tell any clan the truth about what we were. Me and Little John agreed right away. Doria Natchez said she'd have to consider it, and Nicky Walton flat-out refused the offer. After Nicky disappeared, Doria changed her mind and jumped on the bandwagon. That worked pretty well for a while, running with the Giovanni and being a part of the family. They accepted us as equals and kept us in money, blood and fellowship. Until Little John decided that he wanted the right to sire progeny. Don Michael refused him, and John just didn't take it well. I guess maybe it was a little less than a month later that word got out on the Giovanni adopting some Caitiff and calling them family.

You can't imagine how pissed-off the don was after that. The sun had just set when four of the meanest goons you ever dreamed up broke down the door and dragged my butt all the way to the offices of the big guy. When I got there, there were eight more of the king-size ghouls all but carrying Little John and Doria into the offices. It was a weird feeling being on the wrong end of the enforcer routine. Normally, we were the ones kicking down doors and retrieving the morons with loose lips.

The don was a big man, and by big I mean he was round as a bowling ball and tall as an oak tree. I'd never seen him lose his temper before; he always kept everything bottled inside and left it to the others working under him to do the screaming. Not that night, let me tell you. He went off like an air raid siren, screaming about how we had betrayed his trust and caused humiliation for all the clan because one of us had told a visiting Nosferatu that we were Caitiff. A Nosferatu. Word would have gotten out slower if we'd just broadcast it on the national news. Well, listen, me and Doria had always kept our mouths shut, and that was the end of the matter. Not so Little John. He always liked to nip at the drunks, and now and then the boozed-up blood got the better of him.

Doria and I just looked at him, letting the don know the truth and letting John know that he was on his own. Don Michael didn't waste a whole lot of time making his dissatisfaction known. He showed all three of us into a room with a large metal table complete with leather straps and every surgical tool you've ever seen in a mad scientist movie. After the goonies had strapped John in place, the don made us prove our loyalty by dissecting our companion while he and a few of the big boys watched. John begged and screamed until we removed his vocal cords. After that, he just thrashed around as much as the leather restraints on the vivisectionist's table allowed.

Hey, it was us or John, and he was never that great a friend, just a business associate. After three years of telling myself that, I almost started to believe it. As a gesture of his appreciation for our loyalty, Don Michael let us live and rewarded us with a wad of cash before exiling us from Vegas.

Doria went her way, and I went mine. Last I heard of her, she was running with the Sabbat down in Mexico. But who can say what's true and what's not these days? Not me. From Las Vegas, I decided that the time was right to try my luck in San Francisco. Around the same time they discovered I was Caitiff, most of the Kindred started giving me the cold shoulder. How can these bastards be surprised that so many Caitiff run with the anarchs or even with the Sabbat rather than deal with the bias thrown in their faces?

I've heard that it's even worse in Europe and Africa, where Caitiff are often destroyed on sight, because *The Book of Nod* supposedly calls the clanless a sign of the coming Gehenna. Even if it were true – which I don't believe – how could

murdering the weaker Kindred make the situation any better? If the Antediluvians will rise and feed on us, it won't make a difference if a few more are clanless or not.

I've met a few who decided they couldn't stand to be with their own clans any longer and rejected the Kindred policies by declaring themselves as *Ishmaelites*, *Autarkis* or *Nomads* – the willingly outcast – thus bringing the rage of their elders upon their heads. Most of the Nomads don't live long. I understand a few have survived by joining with the Inconnu, but I don't trust that. In truth, the only thing I've learned as a Caitiff is that there are none among the Kindred who can be trusted. Except perhaps for others who have been rejected for their weak blood.

That's another thing that pisses me off. This entire "weak blood" thing is a crock of buffalo chips. I've met others among the outcast who were strong enough to bend steel in their hands or had developed their own Disciplines as a response to their lack of training. I don't think the blood of Caitiffs is weak. I think it's purer than the blood of the clans, less tainted by the limitations set on each clan by their eldest members. Why do all the Brujah frenzy so easily? Is it because the clan only picks people with short fuses to Embrace? I doubt it. Why do the Nosferatu almost universally turn blue and warty? I'd bet they didn't look that way before the Embrace. I mean, they were probably ugly, but not that ugly. I think it's the taint they get from their clan's founder. I've heard that Caine cursed almost every line in one way or another, so what happens when you are sired and no faults come your way? I think that you are too strong for the curse to affect you.

What the hell are you laughing at? Fine, you disagree with me, then you explain it. I was sired by the Venttrue, but I've never suffered from the need to feed on only one type of human. I can feed on anyone I damned well please and still get all the nourishment I need. So you want to tell me why that is? I thought that'd shut you up.

Let me explain something to you. I'm only doing this because I thought maybe you were being straight with me, and maybe it's time someone other than another Caitiff had a chance to hear what I have to say. You want to hear what I've learned and reasoned out of this? Then you'd do well to remember that I can leave anytime I want to. Sure, you could stake me, but what would you do when I got up and moved around anyway? I've learned a few tricks that are all my own, and I'm not sharing them with you or any other Tremere. Don't get me wrong, I respect the powers you have, and I even respect your willingness to learn about the Caitiff. But I don't intend to take crap from you or any other vampire any more. I've mastered a few tricks that would leave you lying in torpor if I decided to stop myself before you were just ashes on the ground.

Now, where was I...? I told you about Doria earlier, right? Well, let me tell you something; I've run across some of the Panders – the Sabbat equivalent of Caitiff – and they aren't like regular Caitiff anymore; they've become limited. What do I mean? I mean they aren't capable of developing new powers the same way as the Caitiff that refuse to drink the blood of their compatriots. Some of them even start developing the same characteristics as the clans they drink from. That just proves my point about the mind-set – they drink the blood of the limited clans, and they sometimes develop the limitations of the ones they share blood with. How do I know? I've spoken with them. They love suckering new Caitiff into joining them. They figure we'll be easier to deal with, just because the Camarilla rejects us. Worst part is, often as not they're right. I've seen a lot of the clanless – listen, I hate that phrase almost as much as I hate the word *Caitiff*.

If it's okay with you, I'll just call us the *Unbound* – I've seen a lot of the Unbound migrating towards the Panders, because there is strength in numbers. What do I mean by "Unbound?" I thought I'd already explained that, we don't suffer from clan limitations. We aren't bound by the unique flaws that every clan seems to suffer from. Got it? Good.

It may suck to see so many of the Unbound jumping on the Sabbat bandwagon, but them's the breaks as the old saying goes. I wasn't kidding earlier when I said that you Camarilla-types can get nasty about the clanless coming into your territories. Even the Gangrel can get touchy if they discover Caitiff in their areas. There's just something about us that seems to piss you off. You might claim that it's because we're weak-blooded, but I think it's an unconscious acknowledgment of our freedom and our ability to come up with new powers which no other Kindred can imitate.

Have you ever heard of Yaryan? He's a mean dude up Chicago-way, and I understand he's become Unbound. He actually created his own Discipline to see into the spirit world, and he can even transport himself there. You want to try prying information out of him, you go ahead and be my guest. But I've heard that the last one who tried got smashed into so many atoms for his troubles. I've never met Yaryan, but I know Caitiff that have, and they say he's something else, really powerful and really dangerous. Check out the records if you can find them. I understand he's only five times removed from Caine. Yep, sixth generation and a Caitiff. Why don't you chew on that for a while?

How about the Stoneman? I thought that name would wake you up. It's true, you know. He really can rip the heart out of a vampire just by thinking about it. I saw him do it to a whole pack of Sabbat who tried to tackle him. I was with him, learning a few tricks and trading some things I knew in return when they came to drink his soul. Scariest damn thing I ever saw, he just held his hand out and looked at the leader of the pack. Less than a second later, her chest exploded outward and her heart just kinda flopped on the ground at his feet. What it did to the humans with the pack you don't want to know about. Let's just say it's hard to get the gray matter out of your clothes. And, yeah, I learned some tricks from him, like I said. Just remember that.

I could go on about this, but I think you've probably got the point by now. You call us Caitiff, I call us the Unbound. But maybe the best way to look at it is that each of us is potentially a unique bloodline waiting to happen. I'll mention one more, and there's a chance that you've never even heard of him. He calls himself the Mariner, and he stays underwater most of the time. He could tell you a thing or two about the *Titanic* sinking, and I understand he can generate electricity like an eel and has a venomous touch that would put a Portuguese man-of-war to shame. I can't guarantee that he's a Caitiff, though. Rumor has it he's just one from a whole clan of Asian Kindred. Not that I trust hearsay, mind you.

How long have the Caitiff been around? Well, I've heard tales of some Unbound who are much older than me and far more powerful. My favorite answer to that question is, since Caine was cursed. Well, think about it. Caine sure as hell didn't belong to a clan, now did he? He's the first – everyone else came after him. Every Discipline, except maybe for Thaumaturgy, originates with Caine. The second generation didn't have any clans, except maybe for being from Clan Caine. It was the Antediluvians who all got stuck with the character flaws and started passing them down to their descendants. I know you'll disagree, but I think the Unbound are closer to Caine than any of the clans, because they don't suffer from the taints of any Antediluvian. Who knows, maybe the Caitiff are really just members of Clan Caine.



I know of at least three different Caitiff who are fourth generation. Get that stupid look off your face, and stop laughing. I'm serious. All right, think about it this way: Where do the Samedi come from? How about the Daughters of Cacophony or the Baali? I understand there are several bloodlines, like the Blood Brothers and the Kiasyd. Where do they come from? Either they're being created from Caitiff – and in my opinion, anyone who creates a new Discipline is Unbound and therefore a Caitiff – or there are at least five Antediluvians running around which you don't know about. Which sounds like a better idea to you? What? No, I don't include the Gargoyles. Like I said before, I've done a lot of research into the Caitiff, and I know from talking with a few of the Gargoyles that your clan created them.

(*Here I must break in again. To the best of my knowledge, the various bloodlines have nothing whatsoever to do with the Caitiff. All of my research to date leads to the founders of the various bloodlines breaking away from established clans after an extended period of time as members of their 'parent' clans. The only exception to this being the Gargoyles, whom we created to be our bodyguards. While I do not doubt that Solomon Grey is a very intelligent and well-educated individual, I believe his philosophies on the "Unbound" are heavily tainted by his own desire to be more than what he is, a Caitiff.*)

Do I know of other bloodlines? There's the Gaki in Japan, the Vhrujunka out of Australia, the Pasdoranitas from Colombia and the Zhulukall from Africa to name a few. I know others, but I won't tell you about them. Some of them are still too small to let you know about. I know how the Tremere think, and I know what you'd do to them if you had the chance. I wouldn't be talking to you now, if I didn't know I could get away from you whenever I wanted to.

You've got a bigger worry than you'd like to think. Two of the Camarilla's clans started off as bloodlines – and yes, I include your own in that number – and then worked their way up to the top. What's to stop someone else from doing the same thing? You don't think that's what the Baali have in mind? If not, you better think again. It's all about survival of the fittest. You should be able to appreciate that. If Gehenna ever really comes around, who can say which clans will still be around and which will have been replaced? History can and does repeat itself.

The other answer to your question is that the Caitiff have only been creeping around for 50 or maybe 100 years. I don't buy it. I think we've been around a lot longer than that. We just forgot how to hide ourselves. Or maybe we just stopped trying to hide ourselves. We've got nothing to fear anymore, not with the numbers of us that are showing up.

(*Again, Grey's beliefs are tainted by his own clanless stature. While it is true that a very small number of Caitiff have been around for some time, most are accurately perceived as a modern phenomenon. The growing carelessness of the various clans — ours is obviously not included — has lead to the propagation of these weak-blooded mongrels. Grey's attempt to educate me as to how long the Caitiff have been around is obviously a pathetic attempt to give his kind a history that they are lacking. Additionally, when the generations of most clanless are considered, there is really no chance that the majority could have been around very long. Most are 11 or more times removed from Caine or more. The thinning of the vitae is inevitable after a certain point.*

Really, one could almost feel sorry for the lout.)

END TRANSCRIPT



An interesting side-note on Solomon Grey. After intensive studies (using the most humane methods I could manage under the circumstances), he did indeed reveal several unusual talents. Under extreme duress he actually learned to shed his skin and even to grow an additional mouth on an extended trunk in an effort to gain sustenance. After 17 nights completely bound and helpless, I found only the outer three layers of his skin and an unusual black liquid that showed certain characteristics of Kindred blood. Unfortunately, my best efforts to revive the four ghouls he killed in his escape proved futile. The one that lasted longest managed to utter the words: "It could speak, Master. The bug-thing could speak," before passing away. The resulting autopsies did indeed show signs of damage that bore a passing resemblance to those allegedly possessed by the Stoneman.

The only sign I found of his escape, excluding the obvious signs in my work room, was a substantial amount of some woven material bearing properties similar to the strands created by silkworms. I've little doubt that Grey managed to create this substance as protection from the sun's rays, as more of the black liquid was captured within the strands of the cocoon.

Lifestyles of the Unwanted

Or, Where to Go When There's Nowhere to Hide.

Beware those who walk without a clan,
or they will be our undoing.

Pity them! Adopt the orphans where you can.
But watch them. In them is the bad seed of their Sire.

— The Book of Nod

The Unbound are beneath the notice of many Kindred, a situation that is both boon and curse. Many of the Caitiff go years without having any contact with the most powerful vampires, never worrying about the Jihad and the dangers



of being used as a pawn. The majority, however, are the first line of offense in the continuing struggles of the Methuselahs. They are the most expendable pawns and a seemingly endless source of amusement to the elders of all clans.

Still, they are a source of worry to some Kindred who fear their presence as a sign of the coming Gehenna, and almost always an embarrassment to their sires, a sign that their blood is too weak to create proper childer. They are universally hated and reviled by all whom they encounter among the Kindred.

How is it then that any Caitiff manage to survive? Many of the Kindred, though disgusted by the Caitiff, still acknowledge that the clanless have the right to live among the Damned. Each is taken as an individual, without the benefits of a clan to support them. Just as with the youngest of vampires, they are given a chance to prove themselves worthy. In some rare cases, the Unbound are accepted as equals simply because they learn everything they need to know in order to survive in the cutthroat world of the Kindred. By showing proper fealty to older and more knowledgeable vampires, they have all but been adopted by the clans they stay with most frequently.

Many flee to the Sabbat, clinging to the promises of power they have been offered and learning only later that there are biases even among the Kindred who have surrendered to the Beast within. A surprising number of the Caitiff actually carry on their own Masquerade, impersonating one clan or another and slowly working their way into Kindred society in a region far from where they were Embraced. That route is filled with dangers, as many of the older vampires keep careful records of the members of their clan and can see past most of the lies told by the naive Kindred. Most are forced by circumstances to fall in with the anarchs in order to survive. Among the anarchs, the lies of a strong heritage are easier to carry off, and the anarchs are more willing than the Camarilla or Sabbat to accept individuals on their own merit rather than on the strength of their clan ties.

No matter what course they choose, the Caitiff discover that they are normally considered second-class citizens or even degenerates before long. The unlife of the weak-blooded is not an easy one.

Several recent movements among the Caitiff have come into being, movements designed to reduce the horrible odds against them. The best known of these is the Sabbat "clan," the Panders. While there are many in the Sabbat who refuse to acknowledge the Panders as full equals, there are only a few who are stupid enough to be vocal about the matter.

Other movements have met with less success, such as the 1973 attempt by a group of eight Caitiff to demand equality in the Camarilla. The group, lead by a radical eighth generation Caitiff named Alexi Darba, attempted to force the Camarilla to acknowledge them as a clan in their

own right. Perhaps their greatest mistake was attempting to lead this movement during the Conclave in Venice. The eight Caitiff proved no match for the seven Justicars and their Archons, and, if the rumors can be believed, became dinner for the Inner Circle before the sun rose. Whatever the truth, they were never seen again.

According to a few, the most successful way to gain acceptance is to create a new bloodline. However there is no solid guarantee of success in consciously trying to create a new Discipline, and there is always a substantial chance of failure. Not every Caitiff is strong enough to sire progeny or to protect themselves and their childer once such an attempt is discovered. Additionally, a Caitiff too many times removed from Caine would only succeed in creating a weak, ineffective bloodline.

Despite the efforts of many among the clanless, there is no guarantee of safety nor any certain formula for being accepted into the ranks of Kindred society as an equal.

Unbound Hordes

Of late a new movement has started in several cities. Caitiff have started gathering in small groups and staying together as a coterie. These coteries are not very powerful in comparison to the major clans, but by banding together, they have made attempts to stalk and kill the Caitiff within fiefs more difficult. Substantial numbers of Kindred are required to hunt down these hordes, and the attempts often end in failure. The Camarilla has not reached an agreement to stop unification of these Unbound hordes, but most of the primogen of major cities agree that there is a very real element of danger in leaving these groups to their own designs.

Some claim that another Pander is attempting to start a movement for recognition with this wave of hordes. Others claim that the Sabbat Panders are being more covert in their attempts to infiltrate the cities held by the Camarilla by building their own packs within the cities. Still others believe that these groups of Caitiff are simply acting instinctively to save themselves from the ostracism forced on them by the clans. Whatever the case, these hordes are increasing in size and strength.

In the Small Towns

The Unbound have started realizing that small towns are less populated by the Camarilla Kindred. The limited herds, the less-established protection from Lupines and the increased difficulties in maintaining the Masquerade have worked to limit the numbers of Kindred found in small towns across America. Many of the Caitiff, seeking to avoid clan persecution, have re-located to areas where the Kindred population is small or even non-existent.





The Camarilla has not stopped these efforts, but does monitor the situation wherever they find small town havens. Any breach of the Masquerade in these areas all but guarantees Final Death in a matter of only a few nights. The village occupation also ensures that the Sabbat cannot easily sneak into an area without being noticed by the Caitiff, who normally must swear fealty to the prince of the closest major city. Failure to promise loyalty normally results in having a Gangrel or two pay the foolish Caitiff a visit or even bringing the clanless back to the closest prince for judgment.

Politics Among the Unbound

A Thesis by Solomon Grey

The politics among Caine's descendants can be dangerous. For the most part, Caitiff tend to avoid the more dangerous games played by the Kindred... or so they like to think. In truth, there is no escape from the Jyhad. The best anyone can hope for is to be an insignificant player, a piece too small to catch the eyes of the Methuselahs. That is almost no hope at all. The Jyhad encompasses everything. Aspects of the world that are not apparent to most vampires are still held under the sway of powerful Kindred thousands of years old. The Caitiff are not only pieces to be shuffled about in the Jyhad, they are the most expendable pieces. Some Kindred even claim that Caitiff only exist because the Antediluvians want them to exist. These same Kindred claim that the Unbound are used as a way of testing new Disciplines, created solely for the purpose of inventing new ways to use the powers all vampires possess. Having met a few of the Unbound who have developed amazing powers, I can't help but wonder if this claim is true.

The only other option is to play the game to win, and to accomplish that feat you must be willing to consume the life-force of Caine's other offspring who are more powerful. Yes, I speak of diablerie. I won't lie, I've drained the souls of other Kindred in my time, normally as a result of foolish attacks against me. There is an endless need on the part of almost every clan to believe that open season has been declared on all of the Unbound. Unfortunately, that includes me. I haven't gone seeking diablerie; it has come seeking me. I try to avoid conflicts with others among the Kindred. I don't want to play their petty games or take sides in the great Jyhad. But, like all Kindred, I really have no choice in the matter. There is no peace for the Caitiff. Someone, somewhere, is always trying to find a way to use us.



I've said in the past that we are often the easiest pawns to manipulate, the most expendable pieces on a board that spans the entire world. That's true. But there are ways around the problem, ways to make ourselves too important to throw away. One such method is to get adopted into a clan, a task that is easier said than done, you may rest assured. There are other ways that are easier. Hiding in the small towns is a possibility. Few Kindred like to leave the safety of their precious cities in order to find a new pawn. But there are no guarantees with this method. Too many of the vampires are still willing to seek out unique talents, especially if the talents have something worth bartering.

The Stoneman tries his best to stay away from the conflicts of the Sabbat and Camarilla, but he is still drawn into the web of intrigue regularly. Sometimes he is a participant, and sometimes he is blamed for a mysterious death that he had nothing to do with. Someone found a Kindred who died in an interesting way. Sure enough, the first name called out is that of the Stoneman. I know what the Stoneman is capable of, and the man is hardly an innocent, but he's not responsible for anywhere near the number of deaths they blame on him. Trust me, the Assamites are not above blaming a Caitiff if it'll make their lives easier.

I've made my entire unlife a study of the clanless, and I've learned a few things along the way. Rather than present you with endless documents to show what each of the

different clans and vampiric organizations think of the Caitiff, I'll just show you a few solid examples I've gathered over the years. With each, I'll add what I've gleaned from other Unbounds along the way. The following list covers all 13 clans and a few significant bloodlines.

Assamites

The clanless are a danger to us all. I do not condone assassination without compensation, but there are exceptions to every rule. I would never hesitate to make an exception out of a Caitiff.

— The late Hassan Il Hastifah

The only good thing I can say about these back-stabbing bastards is that there are seldom many customers willing to pay them to murder one of the clanless. We're beneath their contempt more often than not. I don't have anything at all to worry about when it comes to the Assamites. I killed Hassan Il Hastifah minutes after getting that quote from him. He attacked me first, and I had witnesses. The way I understand their beliefs, none of them will touch me since I won against one of their own in honorable combat. Frankly, I really hope I got that part right.

Baali

If you think I'm stupid enough to hang around and question the Baali on anything, you had better think again. I've been Damned once, and I don't plan to make it a literal

damnation, thanks just the same. These sick freaks are dangerous. Do not stop to talk with them, do not beg for mercy from them, and do not hope to fool them. Just run and pray to God above that they do not catch you. Here's a hint: wear a cross. These buggers hate religious symbols.

Brujah

I don't really believe the Caitiff are much of a threat. They are too weak to cause any permanent harm. Just the same, they should be exterminated whenever possible. They breed like cockroaches and have a monumental disregard for everything that we hold sacred. Do not believe for one moment that they have no connections; they are being manipulated by at least a few of the shrewder Methuselahs.

— Critias, Elder of Chicago

I do not trust the Brujah, and I do not like the Brujah. They are mercurial and dangerous. Watching one of these guys frenzy is like watching a food processor tear into a rotten banana. If you look at them cross-eyed, they'll rip your throat out and drink you for breakfast. Also, they want to push everyone around. The Venttrue don't like them, the Nosferatu don't like them and I don't like them. If one gives you help or a hand-out, you can expect he wants something in return. On the bright side, if you can lie even halfway well, these jerks are likely to believe that you are among their numbers.

Followers of Set

The clanless are a detrimental side-effect of non-selective Embraces. They are a danger that should not be overlooked or ignored. Given a choice between allowing a Caitiff to live or Embracing a cobra, I would choose the snake. Never believe that they are separated from one another. I hold that the Camarilla and its foolish followers are responsible for the creation of these pale charlatans.

— Nefertiti, self-proclaimed Queen of Europe

Would you like to discuss scary? The Setites are dangerous. They're like their namesakes, snakes that would sooner bite you than talk to you. These Kindred hold that they are the only Kindred that should be allowed to live, and they make it well-known that Caitiff are abominations in their eyes. Stay away from the Setites, or you'll likely end up getting fed to one of their pet snakes. I understand they make sacrifices to Set, just like he was a real god. Apparently Set isn't really picky as to what clan his sacrifices come from, so long as he gets vampiric blood.

Gangrel

*I don't give a flying **** about Caitiff. Survival of the fittest. Sure, some of the Caitiff come from our own clan. Poor fools. Teach 'em what you can, and send 'em on their way. We're all on our own here, each of us fighting the damn rat bastards that run the show. Why should the Clanless get special perks? Way I see it, they're looking reality straight in the eyes, and if they blink... well, another casualty in the war.*

— Dr. Raoul King

I haven't met too many Gangrel. They tend to stay away from the sorts of areas that I frequent, but that's fine. They've never given me any grief, and I don't give them any. We have a mutual understanding about who has rights to what territories. Simply put: If they say leave, I do. No questions asked. You have to be tough to survive in Lupine territory — and they do it all the time.

Giovanni

We take care of our own. There are no Giovanni Caitiff. We don't leave our trash lying around in the street. The other clans would do well to clean up after themselves, as we don't see the need to play housemaid. Capise?

— Don Michael Antonio Giovanni, Prince of Las Vegas

I'm biased in my opinions. They've treated me well enough in the past. Still, most of the Caitiff I've met say they wouldn't trust the Giovanni to bury their own mothers if there wasn't a profit to be made. Be sure you don't get on their bad sides. And if you find yourself working for them, you make good and damned sure you don't screw up.

Lasombra

We are all equal in the Sabbat. Some are just more equal than others. Don't think they're useless — just don't expect too much from them. They can't even follow the Disciplines of the clans that sired them. What makes you think they could follow complicated orders? But just like the best dogs, if you give them a bone or two for their efforts, they can prove loyal to a fault.

— Anders Waldegren, Bishop of Long Island

You just have to love a clan that's as busy stabbing each other in the back as they are stabbing everyone else in the back. Don't piss them off, and you'll be fine. Just don't trust them either. These guys are sneaky, in a manipulative way, as the Venttrue, so don't go running your mouth around them.

Malkavians

I like Caitiff. They tend to talk too much, but if you feed them well enough, they can be good companions. Just don't tell anyone I said that. Did I mention that they almost always end up joining our clan?

— Bloody Mary, Elder of San Francisco

I really don't mind the Malkavians, but they can get scary if you hang around with them for too long. The worst part of it is that they start making sense after a while. Sometimes I think the insanity is all just a gag, and other times they prove me wrong by doing the most outrageous things. What other Kindred would play tag with a train?

Nosferatu

The Caitiff are sad things. They have no clan, no power and no safety. But they can get into places where even we would be noticed. The best way to handle the clanless is to judge each one individually, as they are very much individuals. If you find one



you can trust, all the better. Spend a little time trading information from time to time, and they can be a part of your continually growing network of informants.

—Khalid, Elder of Chicago

These sick bastards are proud of the way they look. You might think I'm joking, but I'm not. Most of them revel in being as offensive as possible. I've talked to a handful of Caitiff who were sired by the Nosferatu, and in each case they swore their sires tried to kill them when they didn't go through any sort of changes or even when they didn't get ugly enough. I don't doubt it. Never talk with a Nosferatu; they'll act really chummy until you let slip anything that could possibly be used against you later, and then they'll sell the information to the highest bidder. They have no redeeming qualities, and they seem to think we're their scratching posts.

Panders

There are no Caitiff among the Sabbat. Join us, and you too can know what real unity is like. You don't have to be alone, my brother. You can join us and be among your own kind. There's strength in numbers.

—Joseph Pander, nominal head of the Pander "clan"

Let's get this straight once and for all. There is no clan called the Panders. They're just a bunch of Caitiff that forgot what individuality means. They are fighting for equality and

begging for acceptance where there can never be acceptance. What's worse still is that they believe themselves to be equals among the Sabbat. It's a ruse, a lie started by the Sabbat to convince the clanless to join them and die for them.

Ravnos

So the Caitiff have no clan. This is a problem? I've seen few members of my own clan in the last decade, but I know they're out there. We're all individuals first and clan members second. The Caitiff just have one less aspect to worry about than most.

—Amril Donescu, roaming Ravnos

I like the Ravnos. They give me a weird feeling whenever I'm around them, but they have the right ideas about life: Enjoy it while it lasts, and make certain that you live as long as possible. Were it honestly possible, I'd join with them. Oh, but don't trust them around any of your worldly possessions. They are thieves, believing that nothing belongs to anyone. They'll steal you blind and drink with you an hour later. On the bright side, they don't get nasty when you steal from them, either.

Toreador

These poor souls reflect all that is wrong with the world today. They are devoid of tradition and as shallow as the artwork in the Sunday paper's comic strips. Pity them, for they have no meaning in their existence.

—Anntoinette Larusche, Elder of Berlin

If you're of an artistic bent, you might find these mushy little whiners amusing for a few hours. Most of them can't go five minutes without explaining how sad they are that life hasn't been better to the Caitiff, all the while denying that Clan Toreador could have sired any themselves. They call themselves artists, I call them bigoted candy-asses. If you can snap a good photo, you can pass as a Toreador for a few weeks and learn all about them. They love talking about themselves and the suffering that their entire clan has endured.

Tremere

The Caitiff are an interesting phenomena. Learning just what makes them different from the other Kindred is a puzzle I would like to solve someday.

— Claudius Maximus (deceased sadistic bastard)

My experience with the Tremere is, thankfully, limited. I do not believe that any clan of vampires is more ruthless or mercenary than the Tremere. They have secret meetings all the time, and they have no hesitation to mercilessly abuse the Kindred they can capture for their twisted experiments. I've heard rumors that they're actually responsible for creating no less than three bloodlines in their time just to make slaves who would serve them. I can confirm the Gargoyles, but the

Samedi and the Blood Brothers have refused to comment on whether or not the Tremere had a hand in their creation. Don't trust them. Don't get near them if you can avoid it. As Caitiff, they'll find special uses for you. I know from experience. Claudius Maximus did things to me that I can never forgive, things that I don't like to think about — God above, how can anyone be so cruel? Another thing for you, they say there are Tremere in the Sabbat that have no ties to their own clan. That's a pile of crap. I've seen Tremere from both sides of the fence joining together in the Anarch Free States and having a blast discussing all sorts of cloak-and-dagger stuff.

Tzimisce

The Clanless are an interesting group, and one with great potential. If they were not so obsessed with being equals, they might one day be significant as a force among the Kindred.

— Danielle Hardling, Priscus of Colombia

The Tzimisce are just another bunch of psychopathic Tremere wannabe's out to conquer the world. Stay away from them, and stay away from anyone that knows them. They have the other clans of the Sabbat fooled into thinking that all Kindred were created equal while simultaneously Blood Bonding the other clans to them. These guys make the Ventrite look like sweethearts.





Venture

A certain amount of leniency must be shown in dealing with the Caitiff. They cannot help being less than the Kindred of the clans. Just the same, tolerating them is not the same as accepting them. They should be watched carefully, as they are surely being manipulated by the Brujah they so often emulate. One would think the loss of them to the Sabbat could almost be a good thing, as they are unruly and effectively useless.

— Sovereign, Venture of Chicago

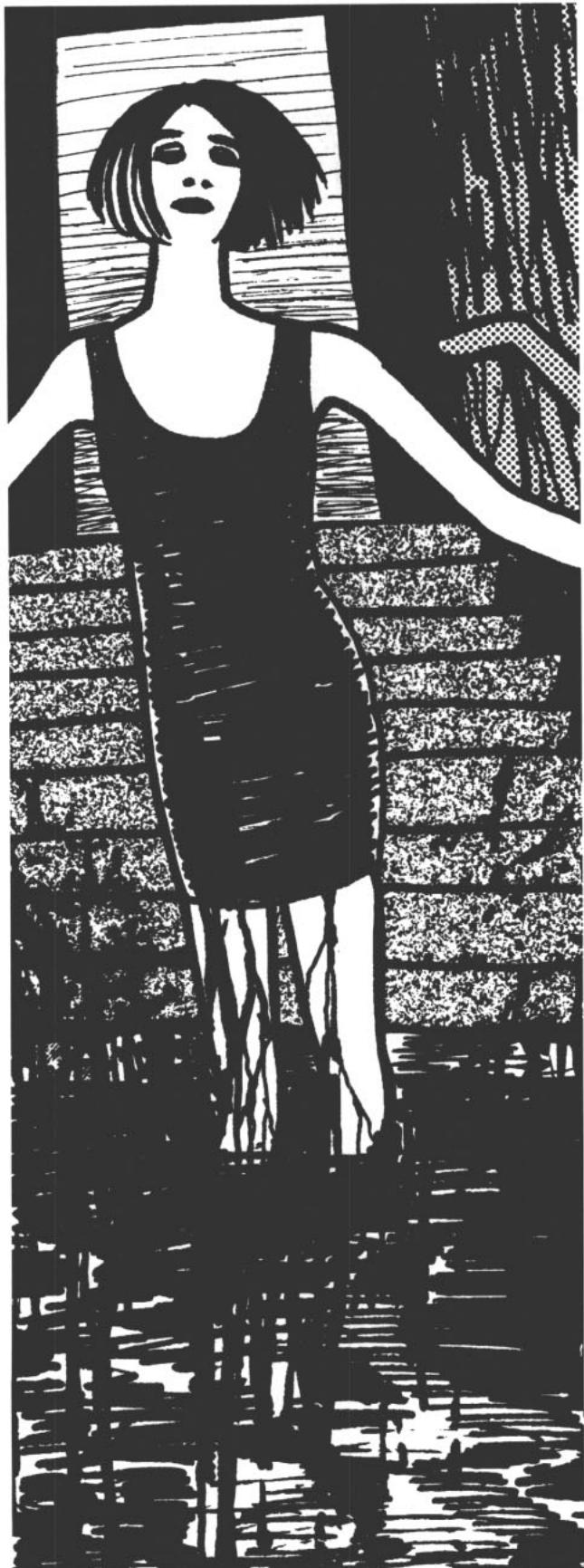
The Ventre are very good at putting on a friendly face and then making sure you don't live to see the next sunset. This is the very clan that rejected me because I was not pure enough for them, but they are the same ones who would swear on a stack of Bibles that the Camarilla holds all Kindred as equals. Proof positive that some clans are more equal than others. Have you noticed that most of the princes are Ventre? Well, there's a reason for that. They have the most money and the best consolidated power-bases. Watch out for this group — they're twice as foul as everything they claim to hate. They just hide their dirty secrets better than most.

Politics in the Big Picture

When it comes to the political sects among the Kindred, they're all just about as corrupt as the political powers that hang around Capitol Hill. They'll each promise you so much, then they'll yank the promised treasures away and laugh in your face. Get this through your heads: We are Caitiff, and in Kindred society that means we're worse than lepers.

The Camarilla

If there's so much equality in the Camarilla, why don't you ever see Caitiff Justicars or Setite Justicars? They claim that all Kindred are of the Camarilla, and then they set the rules to prove themselves wrong. There are Tzimisce out there who don't follow with the Sabbat, but do you think the Camarilla would allow them to hang around their cities? You're damned right they wouldn't. But given a choice between the Tzimisce and a Caitiff, they'd probably accept the Sabbat reject first. Can you guess where they can shove their alleged equality?



The Sabbat

These guys are slightly more honest than the Camarilla. All you have to do in the Sabbat is drink your way to the top, then pray no one else decides to return the favor. Mind you, you'd best be certain you live long enough to indulge in a few rounds of Drain The Elder, and you can bet the odds aren't in your favor. The Sabbat love sending their own personal whipping-boys — the Panders — in to do all the worst jobs and to take all the biggest risks. They figure the Unbound are the best cannon-fodder, and they're right. The poor bastards would do almost anything to receive a little friendship along the way.

The Inconnu

The good news is that there are some elders out there who don't care about the Sabbat or the Camarilla. The bad news is that they take the existence of Caitiff personally. These monsters don't care about their own clans, let alone the Clanless. The only good Caitiff is a dead Caitiff, at least as far as the Inconnu's concerned. Too many of these yahoos believe we're a sign of Gehenna.

The Black Hand

Don't believe everything you hear. The way I understand it, these guys are working for the Assamites and Setites. They just want to make sure that the war between the Camarilla and the Sabbat keeps going on and on, because their masters want it that way. Stay away from the Black Hand — they're dangerous in ways you'll never understand.

Humans

Don't kid yourself, the humans are dangerous. There's a reason all the older vampires enforce the Masquerade. That's because a few of them can remember when the Inquisition came down on their collective heads and turned about half the vampires running around during the Middle Ages into fertilizer. The witch-hunters are a nasty lot, and they don't like the idea that vampires are running around drinking blood, even when they leave the humans alive when they've finished. If they even had a clue as to how far some of the older vampires have infiltrated and manipulated their societies, we'd all be toast. Humans are aggressive and ruthless, more so than we could ever hope to be. Why? Because they're all so busy trying to leave a permanent mark on history — the closest thing they'll ever get to true immortality — that they'll do almost anything to be remembered. Humans made the atomic bomb, but it's the Kindred who keep them from dropping it.

Survival and Advancement Among the Unbound

There are no laws within the major vampiric sects that demand a vampire be of one clan or another. In fact, the Camarilla accepts all Kindred as members of the Camarilla automatically, thus declaring that they have absolute jurisdiction in all cases, above and beyond any claims made by other sects. The Sabbat claim to have accepted the Panders as a clan in their own right, though many of the Sabbat Caitiff have had reason to argue with the equality they allegedly possess. Sometimes, despite any and all attempts to hide among others, the Caitiff are still recognized and labeled. From that point on, they are effectively second-class citizens.

Nothing the clanless say or do will be accepted at face value, unless they first establish a reputation for excellence in one field or another. For the Caitiff, survival depends on being able to fill a need. The Kindred can accept anyone who is willing to do the jobs no one else wants to handle. Even the Assamite turn down jobs from time to time, and that's where the shrewd Caitiff can make a place for himself. All the big boys need bodyguards, and most of them are willing to teach a few Disciplines to you if you play your cards the right way. Be patient, take a few serious risks and come out smelling like roses, then maybe you can learn a trick or two from the heavyweights.

Better still, learn a Discipline that no one else knows, and lie about who your sire is. There's one guy out there (and I'm not naming names) who's got the whole gang of them fooled into thinking he's just a low man on the totem pole of a major new bloodline. He's got everyone so busy trying to figure out where the bloodline's coming from that they're all too afraid to hurt him, just in case he's telling the truth and the Kindred that sired him might take it personally if he was to disappear.

The greatest danger that Caitiff face comes down to trying to escape the persecution that almost always follows us. I've seen a lot of the Caitiff give into depressions so deep that they never crawl back out. They start by leaving the city and hoping they can make it on their own, and then they go off in the woods for months or years at a time, feeding off animals and trying to live like Grizzly Adams. It doesn't work. Maybe if you're a Gangrel living like that is fine, but for the rest of us, there's a certain amount of... human connection, for lack of a better phrase, that's still needed. We weren't meant to be alone. When we are, we start losing our ability to think like rational creatures and





start giving in to the Beast. You think the Unbound have it bad now? Try surviving without any connection to your humanity and see how long you live.

After a while, strange things start happening to the Caitiff that are out in the wilderness, assuming they don't get ripped apart by Lupines. They start changing. It's never the same way twice; some grow more animalistic, some start losing cohesion and just roam around as a fog that grows solid when it feeds. I've seen a few myself, and I've talked with others that have seen them. Devolvers are what I call them. They aren't human anymore, and whatever it is that they become, it's more of a demon than anything else. When you're that far gone, I figure anything that ends your existence is a mercy killing, not an act of violence.

There was one Caitiff I knew....Her name was Veronica, and she just wasn't strong enough to take the grief she got dealt. She took off into the woods, and that was the last that anyone ever saw of her. At least, that's what I let everyone think. I ran across what was left of her about five years later, and she had devolved into something that just didn't deserve to suffer. I was traveling from Fort Worth, Texas, over to Phoenix, Arizona, and I came across her in the hours just before dawn. She sort of slithered along in a trail of her own slime. I wouldn't have recognized her at all, except her face was still partially human and these tattoos from her time before were still visible, even though the rest of her had just sort of merged into a giant snake-like... thing. She was a good 10 feet in length, and her arms and legs looked more like what belonged on a tadpole; they were just residual stumps, useless. She still had the same almond eyes and the same little pug-nose, but her mouth was just a hole filled with little hooks, like you see on a leech. She wasn't very strong from the beginning, and being in the wilderness hadn't done much for her. I tried to make her death painless.

That's why sometimes it's better to take the crap you get dealt by the clans and just keep on going. Even if you can't deal with the clans, you've got to stay around the humans. You've got to stay connected. I don't know if the clans suffer from the same de-evolution that the Caitiff suffer from—I'm pretty sure the Gangrel and Nosferatu do, but who can say about the others?—but the Unbound have a lot to worry about when it comes to their humanity. Even a small town beats the wilds.



Rules

Merits and Flaws

Many of the Caitiff suffer flaws as a result of not being properly trained by their sires. Some of the flaws are minor annoyances, while others can be deadly if not handled properly. These flaws may be taken by any clan.

Bulimia (4 pt. Mental Flaw)

The thought of drinking blood is repulsive to you, and while you acknowledge the need to feed, you often have the irresistible desire to forcibly remove the blood from your system. It is likely that you had an eating disorder in your life before you were Embraced. In order to successfully hold the blood inside of your system until your body has absorbed all of the precious fluid, you must make a Stamina roll against a difficulty of 8. Failure means the sudden and extremely messy (to say nothing of embarrassing) loss of all newly consumed Blood Points as they are vomited from your body. However, any blood gained while in a feeding frenzy can be

kept down. So, the only guaranteed method of nourishment is to feed when frenzied. This can prove to be socially demeaning and often places the Masquerade in jeopardy.

Clan Weakness (2 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Despite your inability to successfully become a full member of your sire's clan, you still suffer from the clan's natural weakness. This can be a benefit to the Caitiff who is aware of her sire's clan, but can become deadly to the uninitiated clanless.

Fangless (2 pt. Physical Flaw)

Something went wrong when you were Embraced, and you have never developed fangs. Or perhaps you were Embraced after being forced into dentures, and the Embrace has had no effect on your false teeth. In either case you are forced to use a knife or some sort of bladed weapon to get at the blood you need in order to survive. Having no fangs also removes your one natural way of causing aggravated damage.



Ignorance (2 pt. Mental Flaw)

The Caitiff are often in the sad situation of knowing nothing at all about the ways of the Kindred. The average prince of any city is not likely to forgive a breach of the Masquerade simply because the vampire did not know any better. The character starts off with absolutely no knowledge of how Kindred society works and must attempt to find a mentor. However, the cost of a mentor for a Caitiff can be very high, and the chances are excellent that the character will end up Blood Bound before too many nights have passed.

The additional problem that ignorant Caitiff run across is not knowing the boundaries between warring factions. A Caitiff Embraced in Chicago might think that New York is an ideal place to escape from persecution, not realizing that the Sabbat control the Kindred in Manhattan. A Caitiff who agrees to join with the Sabbat might live through the situation, but is just as likely to die as a result of his ignorance.

New Bloodline (7 pt. Supernatural Merit)

Once you have created a new Discipline, any progeny you create may know the Discipline. This makes you the first in a new bloodline, which carries a certain amount of prestige but also a certain level of danger. Most clan elders fear new bloodlines, believing that history tends to repeat itself. Point of fact, there are few among the leaders of bloodlines who do not seek or achieve Antediluvian status.

Personal Masquerade (3 pt. Social Merit)

You have successfully convinced the Kindred that you are actually a member of a clan. You may gain Clan Prestige, achieve a certain level of rank within the clan and possibly even rise to become a leader of the clan in your area some day. But as with the Masquerade in general, you must hide the truth even from your friends. The higher you go in Clan Prestige, the more dangerous your personal Masquerade becomes. No one likes to be played for a fool, and the Kindred are not known for their forgiving natures. You need to be constantly vigilant, and you must always remember

the flaw that your “adoptive” clan suffers from. For example, a Ventre’s prey exclusion does not necessarily affect you, but if you’ve been gaining nourishment only from elderly matrons and then switch to hunting attractive young women, members of the Ventre are likely to notice.

Creating New Disciplines

Caitiff have the ability to create their own Disciplines. This is not an easy task. It takes long months or even years of practice and marshaling of the will.

When creating the Discipline, the player should keep a general theme in mind, and the Storyteller must approve each new level before it can be played.

It costs 7 “freebie points” per dot to begin the game with a new Discipline. If the Discipline is gained during game play, it costs 10 experience points for the first level. Successive levels cost $10 \times$ the current level of the Discipline.

Kineticism

Kineticism is an example of a Discipline created by a Caitiff. The Kindred who masters Kineticism can control kinetic energy.

• Dampening

The character can hinder the flow of kinetic energy affecting him, reducing the damage of any such attacks directed against him.

System: The character spends one Blood Point and rolls Stamina + Dodge (difficulty 6). Each success reduces the amount of damage successes against him by one (before soak). Dampening affects aggravated attacks also. A character using Dampening may attempt to dodge at the same time by splitting his Dice Pool.

For example: Ivar the Caitiff is hit by an enraged Gangrel’s claws. The Gangrel hits and rolls five successes for damage against Ivar. But Ivar uses Dampening and gets three successes. He now has to soak only two successes.

•• Redirection

The character can alter the course of moving objects. Thus, bullets can be made to veer away from the character, sometimes even reversing course by up to 180 degrees.

System: The character rolls Stamina + Dodge (difficulty 6). For each success, the character may alter the direction of a single projectile by as much as 30 degrees. Due to the level of concentration required, the character may take no other actions. To redirect a missile back at its source, the character must achieve five successes (180



degrees). However, he must also make a Wits + Firearms roll (difficulty 8) to hit the source. If the target is a person, he may attempt to dodge the returned projectile.

••• Vengeful Strike

The character is able to focus kinetic energy as a weapon. Any attack that successfully strikes the character may be refocused to add to the character's own hand-to-hand attacks.

System: The character spends one Blood Point. When struck by an attack, the character must still soak any damage she receives. However, she may add additional dice to her own damage Dice Pool equal to the total number of damage successes against her. This affect can only be used in the same or the following turn in which the character was hit. The extra damage is only considered aggravated if her attack is aggravated (such as vampiric fangs).

For example: Ivar uses Vengeful Strike when hitting his Gangrel attacker. The Gangrel had five damage successes against Ivar, so Ivar may add five dice to his damage Dice Pool.

Note: Vengeful Strike may be used in the same turn as Dampening as long as the proper amount of Blood Points are spent to activate the powers. However, the character must split his Dampening Dice Pool with his attack Dice Pool (unless he has Celerity).

•••• Discharge

The character can enhance the kinetic energy she generates herself. She may apply this to ranged attacks.

System: The character spends one Blood Point and rolls Willpower (difficulty 6). For each success, she may add one die to her damage Dice Pool. This damage may only be applied to physical attacks, such as fists, swords or bullets. The extra damage is only considered aggravated if her attack is aggravated (such as vampiric fangs). The character does not need to split her Dice Pool between this power and her attack; she receives her full pool for each (unless she splits her attack pool with some other action, such as to dodge).

For example: Sheila shoots a Ventre with a gun. She uses Discharge to make sure she takes him down fast. She spends a Blood Point and rolls Willpower and gets three successes. That's three dice she can add to her damage. However, she still has to make a Dexterity + Firearms roll to hit her target.



••••• Kinetic Shield

The character creates a barrier of kinetic energy in front of her, which may be used to protect herself or anyone else behind the barrier from assaults.

System: The character spends one Blood Point and rolls Willpower (difficulty 7). With one success, she creates a 6' x 4' barrier in front of her that will absorb up to five Health Levels of damage. Additional successes may be used to increase the area (three feet per success) or to add additional Health Levels (one per success).

Caitiff of Note Joseph Pander

There can be no doubt that Joseph Pander had a significant impact on the Sabbat Kindred. His unflagging passion for equality allowed him to accomplish what no other Caitiff rebellion has accomplished before or since. The Pander Rebellion of the 1950s gained Caitiff of the Sabbat the same status of the true clans and earned Pander the title of *priscus*, a rank never before achieved by any of the clanless. Even non-Sabbat Caitiff have heard of him, and several groups of Caitiff mention his name with awe and even religious reverence. The failed attempt by Alexi Darba to force similar actions in the Camarilla failed, but there are almost a dozen bands of Caitiff actively recruiting others among the clanless for another attempt. Pander is still active today, leading his clan with savage efficiency and ensuring that all of the Panders are treated with the respect they deserve. His loyalty to the Sabbat is unquestioned, and his dedication to the Caitiff and to a vision of equality is an inspiration to many of the Unbound.

The Stoneman

The Stoneman's past is shrouded in mystery, and all attempts to get answers about his age or history from him are met with an enigmatic smile. Just the same, there is little doubt that the Stoneman has been wandering the earth for several centuries. His knowledge of Carthage, up to and including the incidents that occurred directly before and after its fall, is amazingly accurate, and his participation in the Anarch War is well documented. The Stoneman has allegedly created several new Disciplines on his own, and is willing to teach the powers he has developed to other Caitiff — if they meet his standards.

Many among the clans claim that he is a myth created by the clanless, a twisted version of Santa Claus and Superman all rolled into one. The Caitiff know better. Some claim he is actually a member of the Inconnu, above the concerns of both the Camarilla and the Sabbat, but no evidence exists to substantiate these rumors. Joseph Pander is alleged to have claimed the Stoneman as his sire, but if he ever made that claim, he denies it now.

The Stoneman is an example to all Caitiff of what can be done to overcome the lack of a clan. Rumors continue that he has founded several bloodlines, though none are ever named. Some few have even made the claim that he had diablerized one of the Antediluvians or that he is actually a childe of Caine returned from the East. Few believe the rumor, but all fear him just the same.

While it is true that he no longer involves himself in Kindred affairs, he does watch over other Caitiff, coming to their aid when they are attacked and brutalized by the clans. No one can say for certain just what the Stoneman looks like, for he apparently can change his shape at will, and he is almost never described the same way twice.



Book Two: Ronin

The Tribeless Garou

*Fair these broad meads, these hoary woods are grand;
But we are exiles from our fathers' land.*

— John Galt, "The Lone Shieling"

Alec Walker stared at the old house in the woods, amazed by how small the place had grown. As a child, he'd felt there was no end to his home and the property his family owned. He could run around the lawn for hours and never lose sight of the safety provided by home, mommy and daddy. Two stories tall and wide enough to cover half an acre of land, it seemed so much less impressive then he remembered. The house was all that remained of his childhood. His father went missing almost a decade earlier; his mother was less than a week in her grave.

He reached into his back pocket for his wallet and pulled out a photo that had long since lost most of its color and all of its gloss. The photo showed his family — mother,

father, sister Deidre and himself — standing in front of the house. They smiled in the old picture. Alec couldn't remember the last time he'd smiled.

October's wind was cold against his flesh, but it chilled him more with memories than with the bite of autumn's breath. The scent of dying leaves and the distant tang of burning wood brought a strong feeling of melancholy, more so than any other time of the year. Where, he wondered, had the life he'd once known gone so terribly wrong?

The answer was easy enough. His life fell to pieces when his father disappeared. Alec Sr. had always been there, a strong provider and a source of comfort when he was growing up. Then, he'd just vanished. He had a business meeting to attend, one of his frequent late-night meetings with a group he called "the sept." That word alone was enough to send goose-flesh slithering across Alec's spine.

There was something ominous about a group of businessmen who would never say where they were or even introduce themselves by name when calling on the phone. Alec could still remember the guttural voices from his childhood, the ones that only said that they wished to speak



with his father. "Who may I say is calling?" he'd ask, just as he'd been taught. The voice always answered the same way: "You just tell your father it's sept business."

Just like a dog coming to his master's call, his father always took the phone and then left the house. Even after they'd moved away from the place where Alec now stood, he'd gone running, ever excited to meet with the dark, rumbling voice and handle whatever business he had with the sept. Then the sept called again, and Dad never came home....

The house had seen better days. Several windows were broken, the roof was in desperate need of refurbishing, and the lawn spread out like a jungle of weeds. To the left of his childhood home, Alec could see the rusted remains of the old swing set where he and Diedre used to play as children. Diedre —

He hadn't allowed himself to think of her in over two years. Not since she'd been found in an alley, dead of a drug overdose. All the money anyone could ever need, and she burned her life out shooting heroin into her veins. Jesus, what a waste. Thinking back on their youth and the fun they'd had sent a dagger of pain dancing through his stomach.

Twenty was too young to have feelings like the ones he was experiencing. At 20, he'd expected to be partying in college, not contemplating what little his life had amounted to.

He shook the dead-end thoughts from his mind, deciding instead to focus on why he'd even bothered to come to the old place. Maybe, just maybe, there was a clue about where his father was. Reaching into his pocket, he took out the electric bill his mother had paid only days before her death. The bill for a house they'd not lived in for 10 years. The thought that his father might have been here all along, hiding less than 30 miles from where the family had lived for a decade, was enough to make him want to scream. He blinked back tears of frustration and, with an effort, made himself move toward the house.

Deep gouges marred the heavy oak door. The marks were old enough to have lost their freshness, but new enough not to have weathered to the same lifeless gray that showed beneath the peeling paint on the rest of the house. Not long ago, a bear — or something just as large — had done a number on the wood. When he pushed on the

doorknob, the hinges screeched in protest. The door fell to the floor with a dull thud. Whatever had tried to get in had apparently succeeded.

Inside, the place was a dump. There was little to indicate that anyone had ever lived here, let alone in the last few months. But there were signs just the same. After 10 years of abandonment, the house should have been ankle-deep in dust, but the floors were mostly clean. The furniture, though Spartan, was still functional. The scent of mildew was strong. Sections of the walls were painted dark brown with fungus, but there was still the faint smell of Sunday dinners and the distant echoes of better times.

There were no modern conveniences, save for a television and cable. No phone. Not even a refrigerator. Just the television.

Who the hell could have lived like this? he wondered. The answer came from a small photo resting atop the battered old Zenith. A photo of the Walker family, smiling for an unseen photographer. "Dad..."

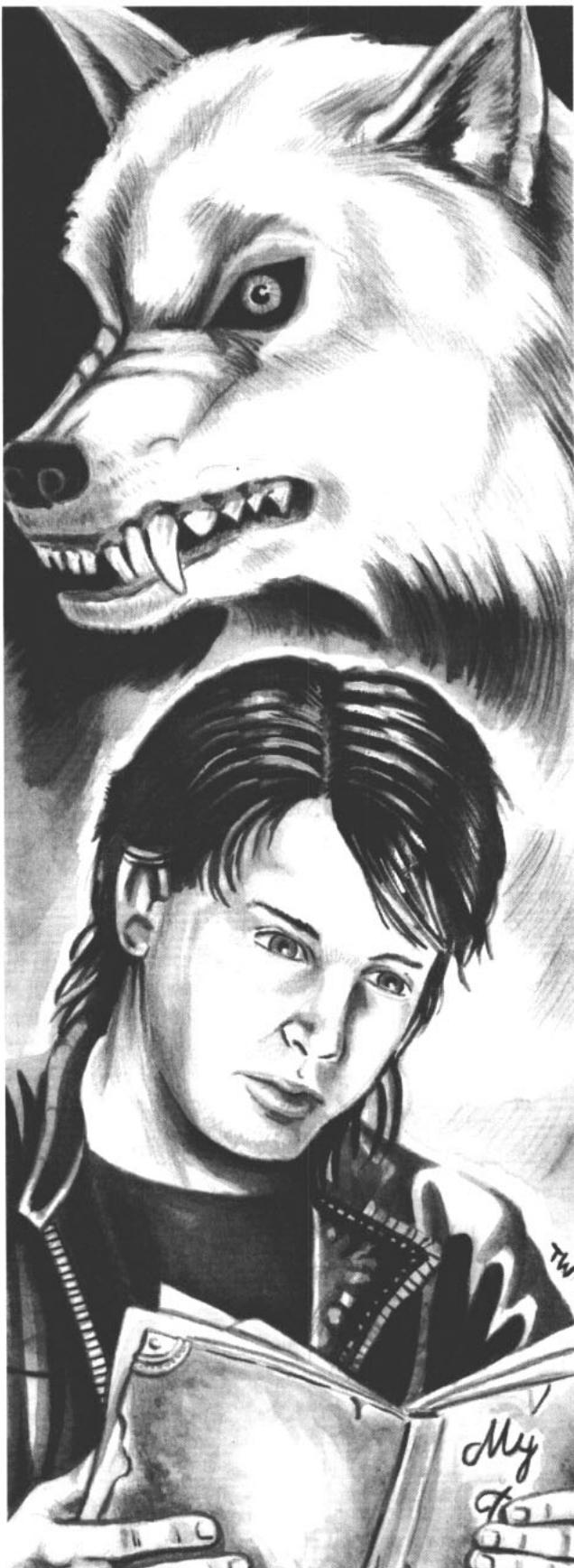
He searched the place but found no other clues. If his father had indeed been on the premises, he was here no longer.

Alec looked around the house, trying to piece together a reason why anyone would want to live in such solitude. In the backyard, he saw the old tree house where he and Diedre had explored outer space and sailed the seven seas in ships created only in their minds. He could remember the day his father had built the crude hut, now in even worse shape than the house. He began to turn away when he noticed the marks on the tree, exactly like the ones carved into the front door. The bear had apparently found something of interest in the tree house as well as in the main building.

Curiosity won, and Alec stepped out through the back door. He barely even noticed that it, like the front door, had been badly damaged.

Like the house, the tree and its primitive, wonderful fort seemed so very small, a pale shadow compared with the past. The October wind whined past the structure, bringing with it remembered laughter from years long gone. The thorn of past memories bloomed in Alec's stomach, growing into a flurry of butterflies. The pitiful, skeletal ruins of his magic playground tore at his soul even more than the death of his mother. Perhaps it was the remembrance of innocence long since destroyed. Perhaps it was simply the distant rumble of thunder. Either way, he hated the feelings.

The sky, dark already with threatening clouds, grew darker still as the sun was blotted out by the approaching storm. He stared long and hard at the tree house, torn by indecision. Finally, he moved forward. His face was eye-



level with the bottom of the rotting structure; climbing to the entrance was easy. God knew he wished it could have been difficult enough to deter him.

There was just enough room for him to stand if he ducked his head. Instead, he crawled on all fours. Leaves had gathered in the corners, spilling in past the doorless archway and falling through the windows that had never known glass. To his right, the remains of an old rope ladder swayed in the sighing breeze. Straight ahead was the built-in toy chest where he and Deidre had kept their favorite toys. Some of her Barbies, a few of his G.I. Joes — the real ones, not the cheap little imitations less than half the size. He crawled forward until he reached the box, opened the warped wooden lid and stared into the depths to see if any treasures remained. In the near-darkness, he could just make out the broken corpse of his favorite G.I. Joe, left behind in the rush to escape whatever drove them from the house. A spider had built a nest inside the shattered chest cavity. The head was nowhere to be seen.

He moved the doll gingerly to the side, reaching for the special hiding place where he and Diedre had kept their most prized possessions. He pulled the false bottom from the box, satisfied by the feel of the boards slipping easily aside to reveal his treasures from the past.

Three round stones glistened in the depths of the cavity, still wet-looking despite their years in the darkness. He snatched them up eagerly, finding the briefest flash of joy in their colors. A battered dog whistle, a cheap pocket knife and Diedre's shark-tooth necklace all found their way into the pockets of his coat. Some memories were too precious not to keep.

Only then did he notice the book. It was a battered old thing, well-used and well-worn. Someone had meticulously sealed it within a zippered sandwich bag, making certain that the seal was closed properly. Few of the original pages remained; instead there were dozens and dozens of loose-leaf sheets wedged between the covers. Written across the cover in a flowery script was the simple legend: "My Diary."

He opened the baggie with a sense of almost overwhelming reverence. Here were the words of his sister, preserved as a momento. Despite his promise never to think of Diedre, the time had come to remember her properly. Perhaps the death of his mother was enough to let him forgive his sister after two long years.

He opened the book, surprised to find the writing was not Diedre's round script, but his father's tight, precise letters...

To whoever finds these pages,
Please know that you are in danger. I
wrote these words in the hopes that one or
both of my children would find them. I have
been nine years away from my family, afraid
that any contact with them would mean their
deaths. My name is Alec Marcus Walker,
Sr. I was also called by another name, a
special title that I no longer have the right
to bear. I was called 'Red-Mane-Wyrm-
Killer.'

I am of a people called the Garou. We are
werewolves. I once served with the warriors
of my tribe and battled many foes. Now, I am
hunted by my own kind for daring to want
peace between the humans and the Garou. I
am hunted as well because I have written
down the forbidden legends and lore, tales my
people shun, for they reveal truths too
painful to contemplate, truths such as our
failure to deny the Wyrm in our very midst,
our failure to forgive those who have fallen.
I was a gadfly for social change. And change
is anathema to the shapechangers.

The following pages represent what I
have saved from the written records of my
time away from the tribe. In these pages are
nine years of my life but for the ramblings
I have excised. They give me good reason to
wonder about my sanity. I have lived away
from my people, my family and my world for
too long. After a certain amount of time, the
sound of my own voice was all I could turn
to for comfort.

For nearly 10 years, I hid myself away,
hoping to survive and see these pages bound
into a respectable volume of research. Read
these words if you would, but only with the
understanding that the others of my tribe
will see you killed if they ever find out what
you have learned. When you are done, I ask
only that you set the pages back where you
found them. My children should know their
father's fate.

I write to console my lonely hours, fooling
myself, perhaps, about the scholarly impor-
tance of my pursuit. This account may
confuse the uninitiated. Perhaps, if given the
time, I shall write a general introduction to
the Garou and their ways. But for now, I
write of the Ronin. I write of myself.

On Being an Outcast

I am a Ronin. I am denied Garou society. It is not a crime of great evil that I have committed, although others would see me dead for my deeds. The Garou aren't willing to change with the times. They condemn me for wanting peace between our cousins, the humans, and our own people. They cannot accept that only through teaching the humans our ways will we ever find any form of peace. Perhaps, if I can teach the humans to understand what we fight for, they too will come to loathe the Wyrm. For my beliefs —for breaking the Veil—I am cast out, abandoned by the arrogant bastards I once called my friends. My only response to my expulsion is this journal.

To allow you understanding of my plight, I need to point out that I am hardly alone, even in my solitude. All too often, the Garou reject members of their own kind, denying them even the courtesy of a name or simple conversation. In some rare cases, the only sin an outcast is guilty of is being metis, a half-breed. But the times when that was the rule and not the exception are long gone. No, there are many Ronin now....

The Stained History of the Ronin

Ronin have been a burden to the Garou since long before the Impergium was lifted, though our numbers have never been as substantial as they are now. Take the legend of the First Ronin. He (it?) was born of two Garou, long ago in time of legend. He was a metis. The Garou had never before seen a metis, and they were disgusted by his appearance, with his warped spine and his pale white, furless skin. He lived with the Garou for almost 10 years before the truth of his parents' sin became known. When the elders of his tribe decided to punish the incestuous mates, their child savagely attacked the sept's leader. The leader survived, but his outrage was such that he demanded the misshapen creature begone, sending him to live out his life in solitude.

As word spread of the foul pariah's attack, the other tribes followed suit and banished their metis as soon as the stunted cubs were old enough to survive on their own. Some Garou, however, took to killing the malformed in an effort to show them mercy. But with the decision to stop culling the human numbers, even the most brutal tribes decided that exile rather than slaughter was best where the metis were concerned.



TW



The First Ronin went to live out his life among the humans, but even with the ability to change his shape to match their own, he was still paler than was natural and hairless besides. Much as he wanted to fit in, it wasn't meant to be. Just as the Garou had abandoned him, so too did the humans. The wild wolf packs also drove him away at his every attempt to run with them. At last, the First Ronin was truly alone.

The Garou are not solitary creatures. Every instinct of human, wolf and Garou alike demands the companionship of others members of their species. The first metis was no exception, and his bitterness grew as he realized that he was forever alone. That is, until the Wyrm befriended him. The Great Corrupter was drawn to the First Ronin's hatred, a hatred that grew stronger with every passing day.

When next the First Ronin was seen by Garou, he was a foul creature in deed as well as appearance. His hatred of the werewolves who cast him out made him a perfect pawn for the Wyrm. In the Great Corrupter he found the only comfort he would ever know, save for the destruction of other Garou.

I can understand the temptation he fell to, but I am stronger than that. I will endure my exile, continue in my studies and prove the Garou wrong for their foolish lack of insight.

But I digress. For many years, the metis took the brunt of the Ronin's curse, with few others being exiled. As the Apocalypse drew nearer and the numbers of Garou grew fewer, the metis were grudgingly permitted to stay among the tribes, but relegated to lesser status and spoken to only when necessary. The metis, knowing no other life, seemed satisfied with this change.

But now, according to the drivel of the elders, the Apocalypse has caused a great disharmony among the younger Garou. I prefer to think that we've accepted the reality of modern life. Where once the youths accepted their place in the Way, more and more frequently we Garou, young and old alike, attempt to rebel against our elders, demanding the right to do as we choose, moving away from the traditions and beliefs of our tribes. The ways of our ancient ancestors are antiquated; they do not consider the evolution of humankind — or Garou.

It is funny, in a sad way. As the dissatisfaction of the younger Garou became more apparent and discussion more frequent, the tribes began banishing the rebels from the tribe to punish them. With the belief that humans were spreading everywhere like a cancer, all the tribes agreed that the death of every Garou who stepped too far from the Way could weaken the tribes in the long run. True, some tribes protested against the initial decision to spare rebellious and sometimes even traitorous individuals, but the Children of Gaia convinced most to see this ostracism as a final punishment before death. I suppose I should count my blessings. At least I'm alive to make my own decisions.

Today, ostracism is universally accepted as a means of severe punishment among the Garou. There are few other options available when the rebellious openly defy the Way and when more conventional methods of chastisement seem unable to halt their defiance. Ostracism is painful for the tribes, believe it or not, because often the young Garou do not return. Every loss is felt these days; even the death of Ronin is traumatic. With every death, there is less chance of a werewolf showing up and saving the day. Temporary banishment can teach a lesson to some, and it is often the last chance Ronin receive before the tribe takes their final punishment against us — Death. Now, in these last days of the Apocalypse, when the Garou need most to be together, there are more Ronin than ever before.

As I write this, I have been more than nine years away from my tribe. Sometimes the silence is maddening. I awoke a few months ago with blood on my hands and no memory of what I had done after I went to sleep. I wonder what I did. The only consolation I have is that the blood did not smell human.

Culture Clash

No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof.

— William James, *Psychology*

I need to explain, briefly, that the differences between humans and Garou are far more profound than they might first appear. The society of the Garou is something of a caste system blended with a traditional tribal structure. Even this does not clarify the picture very well. Suffice it to say that being outcast from the Garou is tantamount to being a leper.

None of the Garou will speak to you unless there is an arrangement in advance. They won't even acknowledge you when you stand in front of them and wave your arms, unless you're threatening them. Those are the rules: no aid and no association with the outcasts. Believe me, it doesn't get much worse. The only Garou who can talk with a Ronin are the other outcasts and the occasional caern Warder of a sept.

Garou run in packs because they must. It is in the nature of humans and wolves to run in packs, and even more so, it is the nature of werewolves. For us, it isn't just a case of preferring each other's company. Pack unity is a matter of survival. The very nature of our being makes our presence unpleasant to most of the world, including other supernaturals and even our Kinfolk. Gaia's defenders are also nature's perfect predators, and even the humans who tend to ignore their instincts can sense this difference. In this, the tribe was correct to consider my actions a blasphemy. Just the same, I tend to believe that genetic

conditioning can be overcome by the rational mind. Humans and Garou alike are capable of rational thought. There is no reason why we cannot get along.

For the Garou, there is nothing as important as pack and tribe, although a few among Ronin would disagree. Gaia's defenders are pack-oriented, and to roam the world in solitude is almost certain to lead to death, unless the Ronin is strong enough to survive alone in a world dominated by the Wyrm. Where none care for the Garou save the Garou, how can solitary existence be tolerated? The only exception to this rule that I've run across is the tribe known as the Stargazers. They seem to like being alone. They are the only Garou I've ever seen who can tolerate being separated from their pack without going a little crazy. Still, it is different for them than it is for the true Ronin; they still have the option of going home. They can return to their septs when the need comes over them. Like the Silent Striders, their lone wanderings are but temporary.

It is not an easy thing, being separated from the tribes. It is a harsh life when there's no one else to talk with. That is why I feel I must write these words down. I've been Ronin for years, but I still feel the need to run with my pack as surely as the ocean feels the pull of Luna above.

The Ronin are without tribe, pack or honor in the eyes of the werewolves. I have committed sins that cannot be forgiven by my people, and even the Bone Gnawers are hesitant to acknowledge me. Back when I was still a Silver Fang, I'd sneer at the Bone Gnawers. These days, they return the old favor. I wander the world alone, seeking hope where none exists and trying to regain the honor I've lost. I hate the solitude I endure, but I know that I am right. The time has come to let humanity know of our existence.

When Ronin suffer exile, that is the sign to all who meet us that we have fallen away from the Ways of Gaia and are treading dangerously close to the Wyrm. Forgiveness is something you must earn from the tribe and race that expelled you.

To be ostracized from the Garou means more than just the loss of your pack and tribe. It means the loss of honor, your name and, in most cases, abandonment by your Kin-folk. Kinfolk are those humans and wolves who know the Garou for what they are, for they are related to us by blood. They are free of the fear and even insanity that visible proof of our existence causes. Most Kinfolk will not acknowledge a Garou who has lost the right to run with a tribe. To do so is to risk the wrath of all other werewolves. I myself have abandoned my own family to save them from the possible threat of retribution from my former sept.

You who read these words might think that losing your name is a trivial thing, but it isn't. In Garou society, to lose your name is to lose everything. It is what makes you a person in the eyes of the Garou. Without a name or tribe, you're just another animal. The werewolves are told to



respect all that is of Gaia, but without a name, even bugs get more respect. Welcome to the real world. There are ways to still use your name, if only to tell people who you once were. It's damned hard to talk about someone if you can't mention their name, so the Garou worked out a system. The proper form when referring to a particular Ronin is to speak that Garou's name, adding -lurf to the end of the name. -Lurf signifies to all Garou that the aforementioned is without honor and no longer bears the name he once held.

Becoming An Outcast

The outcasts of Garou society fall into disfavor for several different reasons. Some fail to meet the standards of their packs; some openly defy their tribal elders; some break the codes of the Litany and so must be punished. These are the most common reasons for ending up a Ronin. However, there are those Ronin who choose to become outcasts. But in all cases, we are no longer welcomed by others of our kind until we can prove our worth.

For those who choose to be Ronin, the main reason for breaking from the tribe is simple. The antiquated beliefs of the Garou are just not compatible with their own. The traditional values which are an integral part of Garou

society do not easily mesh with the modern world. For some of us, like myself, the transition is simply too awkward, too difficult to handle. Many of the Ronin are forced to leave because they cannot tolerate the strict rules of conduct demanded by their peers. Often their lives before the First Change were free of supervision and discipline. (It is a sad fact of life; we live in a world where children are allowed enough freedom to carry firearms, commit violent crimes and even destroy their own parents. The Wyrm's influence is obvious to anyone who watches the nightly news. Beyond the smiling faces of the newscasters, the images of murder and mayhem reflect very clearly the hideous changes that the Wyrm has brought to our society.)

The Garou demand pack loyalty. Many of the new cubs were raised in near solitude or surrounded by people who could not understand the emotional distress of the soon-to-be shapeshifter ere the First Change. This leads to broken homes and maladjusted young Garou.

Many Kinfolk have lost all association with the Garou as the number of children who breed true dwindles. It is not uncommon for cubs to go their entire lives before the Change with no knowledge of the tribes or the Ways. The sudden change of lifestyles can further disturb already volatile emotions. The new rules often conflict with everything the young Garou has known in the past and the



culture-shock brought by the sudden submergence into Garou society is often just too much for them to handle. I believe that simple culture shock is probably the second most common reason for a Garou to leave his tribe. This, in addition to all of the changes occurring in his own body, can break all but the strongest or most defiant Garou.

There are laws that govern the Garou known as the Litany. Minor offenses aren't enough to cause banishment from the tribe. Even certain tenets of the Litany can be broken without forcing the tribe's hand. But each tribe has its own line that, once crossed, leads to exile. The Get of Fenris are well-known for banishing those who flee from combat or show too much mercy. The Black Furies banish males from their tribe automatically, excepting only metis.

While breaking the Litany is often cause for expulsion, even breaking the most important codes is not considered strong enough reason for banishing a tribe member in these last days, the one true exception being the violation of a caern. The Garou believe that there is too much at stake and that there are too many agents of the Wyrm out there.

In a great majority of cases, a Garou banished from her tribe is also the target of political manipulations. Far too many elders may see the young Garou's ambitions as a threat, especially if the Garou is well-liked and aggressive. Political Ronin do not get special treatment, even from the Garou who supported them during their time in the tribe.

The penalties for helping exiled Garou are normally minor, although there is always a substantial loss in Renown. But the penalties for helping the exile of an internal dispute are often severe. I consider myself a political outcast. My views are too radical for the antiquated fools I left behind. If they would only listen to reason, they would see that I am right.

Self-Exile

From time to time, a Garou has trouble adjusting to life after the First Change, and even the most established werewolves sometimes fall into Harano. In many cases, the stricken werewolf feels that leaving Garou society is the only way to escape suffering. When this occurs, most of the tribes accept the decision of these voluntary Ronin. All rank is forfeit, just as with any outcast, but the Ronin may keep her name, so long as she admits she is no longer a member of her tribe. For example: "I am Sings-To-The-Moon, Ronin of the Wendigo." This might be followed by an explanation, such as: "I have left my tribe on a vision quest," but the addition is not required. The title of Ronin is given some small measure of honor in these cases, but even the self-exiled will seldom find aid without exchanging favor for favor or bartering. Some tribes differentiate between disowned Ronin and the Harano exiles by referring to the latter as a Steppenwolf. Literally translated: Wolf of the Steppes, or Lone Wolf.

There is a second kind of self-exile in Garou society: the Garou who does not condone the beliefs of his tribe or who does not follow the same philosophies. A peace-loving Garou whose heritage is with the Wendigo or Get of Fenris is not likely to find warmth or companionship among his own kind. There are also some who accept that they are werewolves, but who have no desire to meet others of their kind or to associate with creatures that often stalk and kill humans, Wyrm-tainted or not. The second form of self-exiled Garou does not gain any respect or sympathy, but can often find a home in a new tribe if he is willing to accept the adoptive tribe's rules and the ridicule of his previous tribe. The simple fact of life here is that no one believes their own tribe is secondary. Anyone foolish enough to leave their tribe and move to another is making enemies in the process.

I have contemplated joining with the Children of Gaia, trying to win their confidence and gain acceptance among them. They seem to understand my beliefs better than most of the tribes. I have not attempted to meet with them as yet, despite the years of my exile. I know in my heart why I have not yet approached them. I am afraid that they, too, will reject me. I am a coward, I suppose. Still, to again hear the howls of my packmates as we move to battle against the Wyrm.... That would be a fine thing indeed.

Life Without the Tribe

I did not realize how very much I depended on others of my kind for companionship. As it stands right now, I cannot even visit my Kinfolk family for fear that they will suffer for associating with me. I miss Elizabeth more than mere words can ever hope to convey. The sight of her, her smell, even the sound of her voice when she is angry with me...I miss all of these things and more. I miss my children as well, but it is Elizabeth I so desperately need to hold in my arms.

I saw my son not long ago. He was a grown man. I ran from him, praying he would not see me. Lately, I wonder if I am right to fight back against the sept. How long must I endure the sound of only my own voice? Be well, Alec, and know that your father loves you more than words can say.

The Garou's entire culture is built around the tribe. But as the Wyrm grows ever stronger, the tribal structures seem to weaken. I have met with other Ronin who feel the same way. It's almost like there's a panic going on that keeps the tribal leaders from agreeing on anything at all. But the end result is that more and more often, situations arise which call for banishing members of the tribe. The Ronin wander the world in greater numbers than ever before. This is not as apocalyptic as it sounds. There are perhaps 50 Ronin in

the world. You'd think that would make life easier for us, but the problems faced by Ronin have not been lessened by our growing numbers. If anything, they have increased.

One of the many reasons the tribes shun their outcasts is for fear of their corruption. A solitary werewolf is more susceptible to the Wyrm's seduction and suffers a greater risk of Lunacy. Contrary to popular beliefs, it is possible to become a Lunatic later in life, far after the First Change. I think it has something to do with being away from the tribe for too long. Most Ronin just can't handle the solitude, and I am beginning to see why. The Wyrm is constantly seeking ways to turn the Garou from their sacred defense of Gaia, and Ronin are a favored target, for they lack the convictions and support of their packs. Everywhere I turn, there are indications that the Wyrm is near. What terrifies me most about that prospect is that the Great Corrupter is starting to seem like a reasonable option.

Despite my belief that Garou and humans can live in harmony, I find that most of the humans I try to associate with are uneasy in my presence. I hoped that by continued exposure to me, the fear would lessen. But the opposite seems more accurate. They grow more afraid, doing their best to avoid me. I've done all that I can to make myself presentable — new clothes, well-groomed appearance and even a new cologne to mask my pheromones — but it is not enough. They are afraid of me on a primal level. There is nothing I can do to convince them that I mean no harm. The Curse.

Wolves are likewise nervous around me. It is the same with most Garou. While they will run with us — or, more exact, let us run with them — for a time, they eventually rebuke us. Our rage is unbearable even to them. It harms their instincts and betrays the packs' presence to wary prey. You know that animals can smell fear. More so rage.

I have heard that some Ronin find a way around the solitude by associating with other supernatural beings — vampires, mages or other shapeshifters. That is not for me. I tried dealing with the Others for a time and could almost physically feel my spirit sliding towards the Wyrm's hungry maw.

Even my one attempt to associate with other shapechangers has met with failure. Most of the other shapechangers don't like werewolves, and the Garou tribes feel even worse about us consorting with them. The Garou do not approve of this behavior, and as long as the outcast fraternizes with these often Wyrm-corrupt beings, returning to the tribe is pretty much impossible.

Dealing with these other supernatural beings also brings the risk of falling values. The Ronin are in danger of losing their connection with Gaia as a result of denying their own nature and learning the philosophies of the other supernaturals. After a while, a Ronin finds it hard to enter

the Umbra. Some are eventually said to even forget how to change. The very notion is enough to send chills through me. To lose all that I have become since my Change would surely drive me to madness. I imagine it would be like losing all of your senses save one. To not hear the wind's spirits, to not travel through the spirit world and see the true beauty that still exists... I am certain that would be hell.

I may well have stayed away from the Umbra for longer than is healthy. I failed several times to break through the Membrane between the worlds. What was once easy became almost impossible for me.

As I have now learned for myself, falling to the Wyrm is all too easy. While I am proof that it is sometimes possible to struggle away from the Wyrm's embrace, the road to redemption is long and difficult. Very few who start down the Wyrm's path ever make it back to the Way. The Great Corrupter is often subtle and uses its wiles to seduce the Ronin with false promises and endless offers of companionship. One need look no farther than the legend of the First Ronin to see how easily the outcast Garou can be swayed. The same fate could befall other Ronin. Any hope of redemption would then be lost.

I pray that I am strong enough to fight off the vile offers of the Wyrm. I awoke with blood on my hands for the third time last week.

Gaia preserve me, the blood was human.

Learning Methods

There is, it seems, an underground network among the Ronin. I have encountered two others who are exiled from their tribes, and they have told me much of what I write here.

Ronin are without Renown. We cannot turn to an elder who has judged and guided us to learn new Gifts or rites. For that reason, spirits will rarely deal openly with us. Many Ronin must barter their services to a more experienced Garou or find new spirits who are willing to teach them. Dealing directly with spirits can be dangerous for the untrained Garou and is one of the Wyrm's favored methods for tricking a Ronin into corruption. An integral part of being a Garou is accepting the dual aspects of reality, the physical and the spiritual. It is almost impossible to separate the two without having experienced both, so I must ask that you take these words as truth. The realm of the spirit, called the Umbra by my race, is as real as the physical world.

Much of the Garou's power comes from spirits. Older, wiser werewolves, properly trained by their mentors, are normally called upon to deal with the spirits. Unfortunately, the Ronin are not permitted the benefits of their wisdom. We must attempt to locate the proper spirits on our own, and we must trust our instincts in the hopes of

avoiding the Banes that serve the Wyrm. Most of us can't tell the differences between types of spirits any more than a layman can tell the differences between types of wheat.

Spirits, like the tribes themselves, almost always require payment or services from the outcasts in exchange for teaching them Gifts. There is also the problem of contacting the spirits in the first place, which normally requires the assistance of a Theurge or knowledge of the appropriate Gifts. Without the aid of a Theurge or the knowledge to call a spirit for ourselves, we Ronin must travel into the Umbra to locate a spirit and attempt to coerce the spirit's assistance.

While it is time-consuming and often leads to messy or even fatal accidents, some Ronin who are older and more experienced have been known to attempt teaching Gifts to other Ronin in exchange for services or in a trade for Gifts which their student might in turn teach them. However, this takes time, and few Ronin wish to be caught openly communicating for so long; the punishment delivered by the tribes would be harsh.

Ronin are often forced to work as mercenaries, chasing down other Garou who have offended a sept in return for learning Gifts. For many of us, it is a full-time occupation. It is a living, but it is a dangerous one. Most Garou frown on this, especially the more traditional Garou. But this method of learning Gifts is considered acceptable and is often the only safe way to avoid Wyrm-corruption.

These bounty hunters are called Hyenas. I was once a Hyena during the first three years of my exile. While I was not accepted as a full Garou, I was at least able to deal with members of my race again. I discovered that I felt better when I was around my own kind, more in tune with my own nature. I began to believe that associating with my own kind actually helped me maintain my spiritual equilibrium. Either that, or I was lonelier than I dreamt possible. Nonetheless, that life is over now, for reasons I will not mention here.

Hyenas must present themselves to the sept leaders, bartering for what they wish to learn in exchange for services rendered. It is extremely rare for a sept leader to offer the same rewards to a Ronin that would be offered to a full member of Garou society. For that reason, bartering is a very important skill to the Hyena.

Naturally, the Ronin is required to complete her task satisfactorily. If her task is to bring back a target she has captured, whether dead or alive as specified by the sept elders, she is expected to return all fetishes carried by the target. Fetishes — implements of spiritual power — are far too rare to leave in the hands of an outcast. One might allow a bum a few spare quarters, but never a new car. That is the best comparison I can make. On rare occasions, a Hyena may keep the target's fetishes as a reward, but only if the target is considered very dangerous and more capable than the Hyena. Failure to return the sept's fetishes is punishable by death. Most septs enforce this rule.

Most tribes do not employ mercenaries regularly and the ones who do often use Ronin mercenaries to do their dirty work. Mercenary Garou who do not work for a sept leader or elder are often asked to do tasks that could bring the Wyrm's corruption upon them. It has long been suspected that the Shadow Lords, in particular, are fond of hiring Ronin hit men. It is no rumor. It is fact. I have been offered hits a dozen times from them, and I have turned them all down. I am desperate for forgiveness — though I still feel I have done nothing wrong — but I am not willing to sacrifice my soul for a little time among the Shadow Lords.

Regaining Honor and the Right to Run with a Pack

To say you have forgiven but not forgotten is to say you have not forgiven.

— Zen saying

Theurges of every tribe have ways of keeping track of their Ronin, watching from afar to see if the Ronin fall prey to the Wyrm or learn to follow the ways of the tribe. I've heard that some of the tribes use spirits to watch over their Ronin, and that others just keep listening for news from other tribes who've run across them. I know some use special skin fetishes. There is a small tattoo on my left shoulder blade which I did not notice for over a year after my banishment. I believe I was marked when I left the tribe. I can only assume that the tribes use such marks as more than a sign of banishment. I believe that they marked me and were keeping tabs on me through a spirit. In this way, the 13 tribes watch over their lost members, hoping that the outcast can someday return. Does this mean that there is hope for me? I fear the tattoo is fading and old. I suspect its spirit has long abandoned it. And me with it.

The Garou seldom interfere with their Ronin, but some of the tribes will indeed seek them out if they fall too far from the Way. In all cases, the tribe will hunt down and destroy a Ronin who falls to the Wyrm's seduction. The Great Corrupter must constantly be battled, and traitors, outcast or not, are not tolerated. I know this to be true, for I have been "tested" by my own sept in this fashion. When I was a Hyena, I hunted down and captured a member of my own sept who had strayed too far. She begged and begged for mercy, but when the sept told me of her crimes, I could not help but turn from her. She was in communication with the Black Spiral Dancers, attempting to join with them to end her solitude. In some ways, I cannot blame her. I, too, have been tempted to seek out the Wyrm-wolves in an effort to find companionship. May Gaia keep me safe from such temptations. The Children of Gaia are looking better and better as an option.

Chiminage

Bone Gnawers: The Gnawers require that any Ronin who would make a request of the elders perform five hours of community service. This normally translates into picking up garbage and keeping their flock safe from other, predatory humans. In those rare septs where the Bone Gnawers do permit a Ronin to use their caern, the price is normally closer to 20 hours of service or enough food to feed the local homeless shelter for one night.

Black Furies: The Furies will not help male Garou. Female Garou must make a formal request and are sometimes required to meet a member of the Furies in ritual combat. The few septs that do allow Ronin to use their caern demand a heavy price (usually fetishes) or evoke a promise that the Ronin will defend all females, save those in the Wyrm's embrace, from harm.

Children of Gaia: The Children require that a Ronin state the full list of offenses that caused his banishment from his tribe, and many will ask questions about what the Garou has learned in his time as an outcast. The few septs that allow a Ronin to use their caern will normally spend several hours trying to convince the Ronin to return to their own sept and tribe before allowing the caern's use. Nature's little social workers are always trying to help you, even if you don't want the help. But they make certain you know there's a price, just like all the others do.

Fianna: The bards of the Garou require that the Ronin sing as much of the Litany as they know before being allowed to make requests of their tribal elders. In order to use a caern, the Ronin must compose a song in honor of the tribe she left behind and a song in honor of the sept she is asking favors from as well. It better be a good song, too, or you'll get turned away. Keep up with your traditions if you want the Fianna's help.

Get of Fenris: The Get require all Ronin to meet a Get champion in battle. If the Ronin survives, he may then speak to the tribal elders and make his request. The Get of Fenris do not permit Ronin to use their caerns under any circumstances.

Glass Walkers: The Ronin must make an appointment to meet with the tribal elders. Use of a caern requires a talen or something of equal value, such as high-tech secrets or insider trading information (if it proves accurate).

Red Talons: The Talons require all Ronin to meet an alpha of the same sex in ritual combat; the survivor can make his request. Use of a caern is rare,

and heavy chiminage is required. This usually takes the form of some quest. Under no circumstances are Garou born of human allowed to use a caern, but most werewolves born of wolf are invited to join the tribe. The only exceptions are those who bear a strong Wyrm-taint. In some rare cases, the Ronin must slay a human before being allowed to enter the caern. The Talons are determined to win back some land for their Kinfolk, even if it is over the dead bodies of a million or so humans.

Shadow Lords: The Shadow Lords require Ronin to remove all his weapons and personal items before meeting with the tribal elders. In cases where the Ronin wishes to use the caern, serious chiminage is required. The price varies, but often it can be as high as a fetish or a quest on behalf of the Shadow Lords. Service normally requires secrecy and a good trigger finger, if you follow my meaning.

Silent Striders: The Striders will always meet with Ronin who wish to speak with their elders. However, the Ronin must recite her own history — what she has seen and experienced and whom she has met. Use of a caern requires a moderate service to the sept, usually a quest of no obvious purpose.

Silver Fangs: The Silver Fangs demand a promise of fealty from Ronin who wish to meet with their tribal elders. A sacrifice is needed in order to gain use of the caern. What kind of sacrifice? That depends on who you're asking. I've heard everything from lopping off one of your own claws to bringing back the head of a fomor. I don't believe that last one though, because with some fomori you'd never be able to tell if it was really dead.

Stargazers: The Stargazers require that Ronin seeking to speak with their tribal elders solve a riddle — a very tough riddle. Use of the caern is allowed to Ronin who can beat the sept's Master of the Challenge in a gamecraft contest.

Uktena: The sharing of stories and sacred smoke is enough to allow a Ronin to speak with the tribal elders. Use of the caern is only permitted after three days of fasting and very heavy chiminage — ranging from a fetish to a perilous quest. Many are asked to perform special rituals or even to leave behind a token of their presence, such as a severed claw or a hank of fur.

Wendigo: The Wendigo do not meet with Ronin who are not of Native American heritage. Use of a caern is not permitted.

I have now had many more occurrences where I woke with blood on my hands. On half of those occasions, the blood was human. Most distressing of all, the last time I awoke with a full belly.

The matter of returning to the tribe is not always as difficult as might be feared, but coming home requires obedience and a willingness to change. Most of us solitary Garou are too proud to simply obey our tribal elders. Indeed, some never return to the tribe because of their pride. Most eventually do return, if only to find solace among their own kind. But there must be some sign from the tribe that we may petition for re-entry. Otherwise, the bawn is closed to us.

The Ways of the Garou are not gentle in these last days. The Garou often require evidence of a change in mannerism, proof that the Ronin has learned from her previous follies. The confirmation is seldom a mere apology. Ronin have lost all honor, and their words are no longer enough to prove their intent. For that reason, a sacrifice is often required, one that shows physical confirmation of the changed ways. For example, a Ronin who has shown disrespect to the tribal elders might be required to show strict obedience for several months before being formally welcomed back into the tribe. During the months of obedience, any and all efforts on the part of the Ronin go unmentioned and unrewarded. Ronin among the Wendigo and Get who

flee from battle might be required to hunt down and kill a greater minion of the Wyrm in single-handed combat in order to prove their courage and loyalty. Worse still, they might be required to prove their courage several times in the same manner. This practice can be fatal, particularly among the Get of Fenris.

Those Ronin who do succumb to the Wyrm are lost. The sept will not allow them back in and will even actively hunt them down if they are aware of the Ronin's corruption. These Ronin-ikthya are sad creatures.

However, I have heard that even the taint of the Wyrm is not unforgivable. There is a legend of a place in the spirit world called Erebus, a realm of redemption for the Garou. To bathe in the silver waters of Erebus' lake is said to cleanse even the worst of tainted souls. But this cleansing burns. Few can willingly withstand the pain. However, it is a last hope, provided you can find it. Once a penitent is cleansed of corruption, most tribes will welcome her back. All rank is stripped from the returning Ronin, and a new name must be earned, but the punishments endured in Erebus are enough to prove a Garou's loyalty.

It is said that those who are fully in the Wyrm's thrall can cleanse their souls only at the cost of their mortal bodies. The hope is that, in the next life, the Garou will return pure.



I have sought after Erebus, yet never found it. I have heard rumors of Garou who survived it. I can't even prove Erebus exists, but I certainly hope it does. Perhaps after I have bathed in the Silver Lake, the sept will forgive me.

Life Among the Outcast

It is trickier than you might think to stay away from the Wyrm. We Ronin are in constant danger of losing our connection to Gaia, not only because we have fallen from the Way, but also because we have few options left for gathering spirit essence. The sacred hunt is not open to the outcast, and bargaining with spirits requires the Gift: Spirit Speech, which is one of the most carefully guarded Gifts of the Theurge. Additionally, the Englings and other spirits will require favors in return for the power they give. The only options left to a Ronin are meditation and soul-theft. The latter has its own inherent dangers. Stealing power from spirits requires battling against them and physically wrenching a portion of their spiritual power away. If you're skilled at it, you may gather as much as half the spirit's energy in this way, but only by destroying the spirit in the process. For this reason, most spirit-thieves among the Ronin only take power from Banes. A dangerous proposition at best, especially for the solitary Garou. The Bane is just as eager as any other creature to continue its existence for as long as possible.

I keep telling myself that here is still hope. In a few isolated areas, some septs are known to let Ronin use their caerns, but only after paying a substantial fee in chimirage. The sept might demand a fetish the Ronin carries, or they might want him to perform several services before they consider him worthy to enter their caern.

Caerns are rare enough these days, and no tribe will allow a Ronin beyond the bawn of their sept without very good reason. Once again, the only option available to most Ronin is bartering. Some of the older and more experienced Ronin have found ways to use Glade spirits as guides in their quest for locations where the Gauntlet is thin and where they can attempt caern rites. The success rate is slim. I don't like this method for another reason: it might summon the enemy. What do I mean? You cannot feel the Wyrm corrupting you, not any more than you can feel the onset of a bad disease. It is only after the symptoms show up that you might notice something is wrong, and by then it is usually too late.

Rumors have been heard by the Uktena, Bone Gnawers and Stargazers that a Ronin caern has been founded and is in use. None of the tribes are certain just what to make of this information, but most of the Garou believe the rumor is just that, a rumor. Surely the majority of caerns are very well guarded, and those that are not are normally reclaimed by one of the tribes. There is a possibility that a few Ronin

have created a new caern, but the odds are heavily stacked against that. The only name associated with this alleged sacred site is the Cranberry Caern. No one can recall ever having heard of a caern by that name in the past. If there is a Cranberry Caern, it must be very well hidden.

Prides

A new phenomenon has started cropping up among the Ronin, and the tribes are uncertain how to best handle the problem. But I can tell you, they're watching it like a flock of vultures watches an injured animal. Recently, some Ronin Garou have joined together to run in packs. The tribes call these packs Shames, as in "a shame of Ronin." But Ronin call them Prides.

These renegade Prides started forming almost overnight, appearing in the southwestern United States and later gathering in other areas as well. To date, most of the Prides have formed in areas adjacent to one another, moving out in waves like ripples across a calm body of water. The elders of most tribes have come to the conclusion that someone — a radical Ronin with excellent military skills, perhaps — is gathering the outcast Garou together.

While these Prides have not attacked any of the Garou packs to date, many fear they are planning to. I've never met one of these Prides, but I'm almost certain I would join up if I were invited. The solitude is driving me to take risks I would never have considered in the past. I recently attempted to join with a pack of wild dogs — yes, dogs! — in an attempt to escape the endless monotony of living alone. Even they could not stand my presence for long. I have been rejected by Man's Best Friend. But then, I am not truly a human. I am more than a human and less.

The truth of these rumors is simpler than most would acknowledge, and logic alone explains it away. With the increasing numbers of Ronin, it is now possible for outcast Garou to join together in packs. Just because it has never happened before does not mean it was not bound to happen sooner or later. Though unprecedented, these new pack formations are inevitable. The biggest worry to the Children of Gaia and a few of the more tolerant tribes is that these Prides will stay together and fall still further from the Way. I can see their point. To what purpose is enforced solitude if the Ronin not alone to endure it? The ostracism forced on Ronin by the tribes has less impact when there are other expatriate Garou with whom they can associate. Loneliness is lessened when there are Prides.

On the hopeful side, I suspect the Ronin who run in these outcast packs have a far greater chance of avoiding the Wyrm's corruption. Others who are versed in the Way, but do not always enforce all aspects of the Litany, can still offer companionship and a sense of balance. It is the solitary



Garou who suffer the loss of equilibrium, but even small packs would make it possible to maintain the connections with Gaia and the Umbra that are so essential for all Garou.

While there are few Prides running through the lands at this time, most Garou I've been allowed to speak with feel the problem will only get worse as the idea catches on with still more Ronin. The problem, as the more militant tribes view it, is that these Prides are growing in number and might eventually decide they have the ability to overthrow a caern and make it their own. True, the tribes would most likely be able to get the caern back, but the loss of Garou resulting from not one but two conflicts for control would be heavy indeed.

The sight of a Pride moving through any area too close to a caern's bawn is certain cause for alarm. The tribes have even gotten nasty when there were just two Ronin moving together — I know this from experience. All tribes agree that any attempts on the part of these Ronin packs to enter the bawn is reason for battle. To date, none of the Prides have crossed the invisible line that separates them from the septs held by the tribes. At least, not that I've heard of.

I believe the first conflict will occur soon. It is almost inevitable. I am making an extra effort to stay away from the caerns for the present time. I do not wish to be taken as an enemy in any such battle.

There is also a fear that the Black Spiral Dancers will seize these Ronin packs and bring them over to the Wyrm. Packs formed from different tribes and cast out by these tribes could tell too many secrets to the Dancers. They could even aid in corrupting the caerns of their former septs. The Dancers would use the information too. They would love to switch all of us over to their side of the war. While no one thinks it has happened yet, there is every reason to believe it will. The Wyrm is too powerful already, and the Prides may prove to be its greatest weapon yet.

I have recently swallowed my pride and attempted to join with the Children of Gaia. They have rejected me. Why? They did not feel I was repentant enough. I cannot put into words how bitter I am. Last night I awoke covered in blood. I'm terrified. Have I fallen to the Wyrm? Have I lost all connection to that which is human within me? I do not know how many more of these strange episodes I can endure. My life has become a meaningless flurry of days and nights. Only this journal keeps me from slitting my own throat. Well, that and a natural fear of what lays beyond that final barrier between this world and the next. I am afraid to die. I am afraid to live.



The Forbidden Tribe

The following information was gleaned from a woman who claims to be a Skin-Dancer. I will not mention her name here; I gave my word that what she said to me would go no further than my own lips. I did not say that I would not write down the knowledge. Just the same, I do not feel justified in putting her name on paper.

While violent encounters with Ronin are still fairly rare, three separate occasions have been marked where solitary Ronin managed to best individual packs. The reason for these unexpected victories has always been the same: Several Ronin have apparently begun bargaining with spirits unaffiliated with the Garou at large and learning deadly new Gifts.

I know now that the truth of these occurrences is far worse than most of the Garou suspect. A new tribe is forming, a tribe of outcasts and metis, led by the Skin-Dancers. I have heard tales of Samuel Haight and his desire

to see the 13 tribes destroyed. I have also heard that he was a madman and consorted with the Wyrm and with Leeches as well.

When the Skin-Dancer approached me, she offered me something I have not had in a very long time: She offered me the chance to join with a tribe. I have spent many hours contemplating that offer. I cannot explain strongly enough how hard it was for me to say no. I am writing these words not only to explain what is happening to the world outside, but also as a warning to my children: Stay away from the Skin-Dancers. They are dangerous, and they may yet cause the downfall of our people. The Skin-Dancer tribe is all that remains of Samuel Haight's attempts to destroy the Garou. While some still follow his goals, most have decided instead to offer a new way of life to Ronin and other outcasts of the Garou society.

The Skin-Dancers have a strict regimen of tests for potential members, and once united to them, there is no turning back to the Old Ways. My contact said that the time has come for the Garou to learn their folly, and that the Skin-Dancers mean to teach this to them. But not with violence, at least not in all cases; rather, by example.

They have a following of disaffected Kinfolk, each yearning for the gift of Garouhood. The leaders of the Skin-Dancers hold out to these Kin the carrot of Sacred Rebirth. The woman would not say, but I surmised that these Kin must aid in the capturing of the skins required for the ritual.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that while the single woman I met was friendly and even sympathetic to my plight, I fear the Skin-Dancers almost as much as I fear the Black Spiral Dancers.

History of the Skin-Dancers

The Skin-Dancers were created by Samuel Haight. They were meant to hunt down and destroy all other Garou. The four leaders of the tribe, leaders hand-picked by Haight, have learned Haight's greatest secret: the ritual of Sacred Rebirth. All were knowledgeable Kinfolk before they joined with Haight, and some already knew a few Gifts even before they became false-Garou. Many are well-versed in Garou rituals.

If the rumors the woman told me are true, the Skin-Dancers have made allegiances with spirits all their own and have started learning new Gifts never before seen by the Garou. Worse still, not all of the Skin-Dancers are ex-Kinfolk. In fact, the vast majority of them are Garou who have joined from other tribes, finding a home and understanding they could not find among their own tribes.

The Deadly Dance: Conflict

The Black Spiral Dancers had several run-ins with Samuel Haight, all of which ended with one or more of the Wyrm-tribe dead and skinned. Haight made several promises to the Dancers that he failed to keep, and none of the fallen tribe mourned his death. For that matter, many of the Black Spiral Dancers believe Haight is still alive, biding his time before he attacks them again. Now remember, this is all second-hand; I'm simply writing down what was told to me. When the Black Spiral Dancers heard about the fledgling Skin-Dancers, they offered the new tribe the opportunity to join with them in the hope of getting the secrets of Sacred Rebirth and the addition of several fertile Garou. The leaders of the Skin-Dancers unanimously agreed to refuse the offer.

Failing in their attempts to merge the tribes peacefully, the Black Spiral Dancers then attempted to force the new tribe to join with them. I understand they sent one of their best collections of warriors, the Deep Waters Hive. None of the Deep Waters Hive survived the encounter. Mind you, I have

trouble swallowing that one. The Black Spiral Dancers have a long history of violence. I think maybe this is just a tale to entice new recruits.

Skin-Dancers and the Wyrm

Well, as you can imagine, I was intrigued by the whole idea of these pariahs trying to make their own tribe, and so I asked a few questions of she who will remain nameless. One of my questions was how she could be so certain the Skin-Dancers would not fall to the Wyrm. She said the Skin-Dancers begin their lives as Garou with two strikes against them. They are hated by the tribes because of the way in which they become Garou — the ritual of Sacred Rebirth requires the pelts of five Garou to create only one. The Garou did not give their skins willingly. The second mark against the tribe is also related to their becoming. The ritual's very nature is of the Wyrm, and all Skin-Dancers who experience the legacy of Haight begin their new lives tainted by the Great Corrupter's influence.

While the Skin-Dancers began in corruption, the vast majority turn away from their former ways, heading toward an inner peace brought on by their First Change. For many Garou, the First Change is a traumatic experience, painful and frightening. For the Garou created by Haight, the experience was more appropriately termed an epiphany. I guess it's hard to want revenge against the people that have what you want when you suddenly get what you've been after. The bitterness and resentment is not as strong as the Wyrm had hoped, and the Change brings forth an understanding of why the Garou considered their former Kinfolk second-class citizens. Rather than screaming, "Now I can have my revenge against the bastards!", most of the Skin-Dancers respond with a sigh, "Oh, I understand. They did not hate me. They pitied my lack of ability." Many among the Skin-Dancers believe that Gaia retaliated against the Wyrm-spawn Samuel Haight by calming the overwhelming rage of his progeny, thus allowing them a chance at redemption despite their foul origins.

I have no idea whether or not the beliefs of the fledgling tribe are accurate, but I certainly hope they are. The idea of Gaia fighting back against the Wyrm in a direct way pleases me. The very notion gives me hope for the future of us all.

I believe the Skin-Dancers are on a recruiting kick. I think they are out to gain Ronin and build the size of their tribe. They must do this if they wish to survive. There cannot be very many of the false-Garou around — 10 or 12 at the most. Unless they've already started gaining new members.

The woman offered to speak with her sept leader on my behalf. I was sorely tempted. I betrayed my vows to both my wife and the Litany. I mated with another Garou. God

forgive me, but I have been so very lonely. I hope that Elizabeth is happy. I hope that she has found another and can forgive my sin if ever I see her again.

Schisms in the Forbidden Tribe

Samuel Haight was well-versed in the Ways of the Garou, but he chose not to follow them. Instead he simply learned them well and learned how best to turn his enemies' weaknesses against them. Haight believed that all of the Skin-Dancers should fully understand the Ways of the Garou, and so he taught his progeny well. He also taught them the Laws of Haight, a half-mocking collection of rules to be followed when encountering Garou and to be enforced when dealing with spirits and Banes.

From what the woman told me, the four original progeny of Samuel Haight have divided. One follows the Laws of Haight, continuing the quest his creator gave them all. One follows the Litany of the Garou, reinterpreting the antiquated rules to better suit the modern world. One follows a new Litany created to join all tribes together and bring forth the final destruction of the Wyrm. The last follows no Litany, simply waiting and learning the truths of the Triat.

While the four factions get along well enough, I got the impression that there are some pretty heavy tensions there. Skirmishes between leaders and their lackeys are not uncommon. But the small numbers of Skin-Dancers and the mutual enemy they all face allows most conflicts to end after a few rounds in the boxing ring or a few days locked in solitary confinement. Military discipline is stressed by all the leaders, and proper behavior is important.

Learning Gifts

The Skin-Dancers are crazy, or they're braver than most Garou. Most every tribe has certain spirits that they are connected to and with whom they have long-standing pacts. These spirits will not willingly work with the Skin-Dancers, and for that reason the Skin-Dancers have sought out pacts with unassociated spirits. The way I hear it, they've met with limited success.

The faction who continues Samuel Haight's quest has had the best luck in gathering new spirit allies, starting with the Puppeteers Samuel Haight met at the famed Valkenburg Foundation. Through this association, the Skin-Dancers who follow Haight's dream can hide their Wyrm-corruption — though every use of their new Gift brings them deeper into the Wyrm's coils. This connection with the

Puppeteers has led to still greater connections among the Banes and powers unknown by even the Black Spiral Dancers.

Most of the Skin-Dancers — those not attempting to destroy Garou society — have learned less Gifts. Some of them have made connections with several totems abandoned or simply ignored by the Garou. While their success has been limited to date, connections have been made with powers answering to Minotaur, That-Which-Howls-In-The-Forests, and others whose names I don't know. A few minor Gifts have been learned, but the totems claim they are weakened by having so few children.

Caerns

Once again, my source has revealed information which I find dubious at best. If the lady was telling me the truth, the Skin-Dancers have located and reopened two caerns successfully. These caerns are well hidden in areas that, at first glance, appear to be wastelands. The first and greatest of these caerns is the Dutchman's Caern in Arizona. Hidden in the depths of the Superstition Mountains, the Skin-Dancers were led to the powerful caern by an image of Samuel Haight. None believe that Haight himself located the ancient site of power, however; his image disappeared seconds after the tribe located the spot. Several ancient artifacts found there have convinced the Skin-Dancers that the caern once belonged to the Nuwisha. The most common theory as to why the tribe was led to the caern is simply that the Trickster totem wished to have new followers of the

Dutchman's Caern

Caern: Somewhere in Arizona

Level: 4

Gauntlet: 3

Type: Enigmas and Wisdom

Tribal Structure: Skin-Dancers and possibly Nuwisha

Totem: Trickster

Cranberry Caern

Caern: Pine Barrens, New Jersey

Level: 1

Gauntlet: 6

Type: Stamina

Tribal Structure: Skin-Dancers and Ronin

Totem: Magpie



ancient ways. The Skin-Dancers are attempting to make a connection with the Trickster, but have had little success to date. Actually, I don't think they've really had any success at all.

I don't doubt that the ancient site is indeed powerful, and I can believe it is invisible from outside its perimeter. Whatever powers the Nuwisha used to conceal the Dutchman's Caern (I do not know why they call it this) are still potent today.

We know the Nuwisha celebrated somewhere, but no one's ever been able to find one of their caerns. My informant said the leaders of the Skin-Dancers are very careful not to perform any of the Wyrm's Gifts within the caern. Several times since reopening the caern, coyotes have appeared in the area. They are welcomed and never disturbed, just in case.

The second caern, much weaker than the Dutchman's, is located in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. My informant said the ancient site was dormant when located, but after two very painful failures, the Skin-Dancers managed to open the caern. I have suspicions that this newly created caern may well be the Cranberry Caern other Ronin have been talking about. I want to find the Cranberry Caern. If it exists and I could point it out to my sept, they may reconsider my crimes.

Cranberry Caern is weak, but it probably suits the purposes of the Skin-Dancers very well. The Skin-Dancer said it is the only caern where all four factions deal with each other and the Ronin who find them. The two primary rules of this caern include keeping its location a secret from the tribes and never admitting to the Ronin that it is actually run by Skin-Dancers.

I will try to find the place. She gave me more hints than she meant to, I think. There is a chance that I will now have a bargaining chip.

That is about all I can tell you when it comes to the Skin-Dancers and even what I have written here is only hearsay. I really do think that trying to find the Cranberry Caern is a good idea, but time alone will tell if it's even for real.

Final Entry

I must hide these pages and burn the remainder of my notes. I have located the Cranberry Caern, and tonight I go to speak with the sept I left behind. I will attempt to speak with the elders and convey to them my belief that I have changed for the better. My long journeys have left me stronger than I once was, more capable than I have ever been and wiser for my experiences.

I dare not let them know of these pages. Surely they would kill me if they had any inkling that I have continued with my studies. I shall never again place pen to paper and record the stories of the Garou. I am repentant also about my feelings concerning the Veil. If you have read this far, please do not mention these words to anyone. To do so would surely mean my death and yours as well. If this compilation of notes is not in the hands of my son or daughter, I pray that you leave the manuscript where you found it. They should have their chance to know of my fate.

If this book is in your hands, my life is likely forfeit. I have returned from the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, and I am not completely certain that I was not followed. The sun is setting, and soon the people in nearby houses will be asleep. I do not fear an attack while the daylight is strong. The Skin-Dancers are far too cautious for that. But when the late night hours are here, I have no guarantees of my safety.

For three consecutive nights I have awakened bathed in a hard sweat and painted with blood that is not my own. I fear I have finally lost my mind. Gaia, grant me strength. Gaia, grant me wisdom.

Diedre, Alec, if you read these pages, know that all I have done was done for you.

Alec closed the book, aware once again of the world beyond the words he'd been reading. His eyes hurt from trying to make out the letters in the nearly complete darkness surrounding him. Only the light from the full moon gave him enough illumination to read.

His joints were stiff from sitting in one place for too long. He was tired both physically and emotionally. Reading between the lines his father had written, Alec found little that could redeem the man in his eyes.

Aside from his obvious delusions of being a werewolf, the man had deliberately written around the fact that he had committed murder in the name of attempted redemption. The pages contained notes about several years spent as a hunter of other outcasts, and, to Alec's way of thinking, that made the man a murderer.

Sitting alone in the ruins of his childhood refuge, Alec could almost believe that the Garou were real, could almost convince himself that a person could become a wolf or even a hybrid of wolf and human by willing it. Thinking back on the heavily damaged wood both at the house and where he was now sitting, he could imagine a monstrous form tearing down the door to seek revenge on a betrayer. The thoughts were not comforting.

Just the same, he collected the papers strewn on the ground and placed them back in the remains of his sister's diary. He had nothing else to remember her by, or even his father for that matter. The frosty air stung his skin as he left the shelter of the tree house. Night had fallen cold and clear across his childhood home. It was time to return to the real world, where he had a job and bills to pay.

Was his father alive? He doubted it. How could the man be alive when his notes made it so clear that his rational mind was gone? Even if, by some freak chance, the Garou were real, they would surely have killed him. There was certainly more information in the notes than any of the creatures would want known by humankind. In either case, the man who wrote the information down was surely "Wyrm-corrupt" by his own deluded standards.

He walked around the old house, rather than trying to go through it. The memories were too strong inside the building, and he was hurting badly enough as it was.

The darkness hid from him the figure crouching in the bushes, motionless save for the eyes which tracked its prey.

Alec had only just reached his car when the savage growls erupted behind him. He turned just in time to see the monstrous shape explode from the shadows and charge in his direction, a feral snarl cutting through the air and chilling him far more than even the bitter autumn air.

"Dad?" he called as the shape approached. "Is that you?"

Powers

*Riders on the storm
Into this house we're born
Into this world we're thrown
Like a dog without a bone*
— The Doors, “Riders on the Storm”

Optional Trait: Corruption

Corruption reflects a Ronin's equilibrium between her connection to Gaia and her taint by the Wyrm. Without the constant participation in Garou rites, Ronin risk gaining a taint which will not go away.

Corruption is measured on a scale of 1 to 10. Add 10 dots to the character sheet, and fill in one dot for each level of Corruption.

The Wyrm is insidious and will do everything it can to push the Ronin further from the Ways. The Hierarchy of Wyrm Taint, below, reflects the acts which will bring a Garou closer and closer to thrall by the Wyrm. Whenever a Garou performs one of the deeds listed on the chart below, she compares it to her Corruption value. If the deed is higher on the scale than her current Corruption, she must roll one die. If the number is greater than her score, she suffers no penalty. If it is equal to or less than her score, she gains a point of Corruption.

Once a Garou has a 10 Corruption, she is lost to the Wyrm and should be removed from play. Before this point, redemption, while likely painful, is still within the Garou's reach.

Removing Corruption is very hard. A Rite of Cleansing will remove one point, but only if it is performed on the tainted Garou within one moon of gaining the point. The ritual must be performed by an untainted Garou (no Corruption dots), and at least three other Garou must participate and spend one Gnosis point each.

Certain selfless acts performed by the tainted Garou may also remove a point. Throwing oneself into battle against dangerous odds to save another Garou or a Gaia-spirit might, at the Storyteller's discretion, allow the Garou to subtract one dot of Corruption. Likewise, risking worse corruption to save a caern, such as single-handedly cleansing a Hellhole or Blight, might allow the Garou some respite from her taint.

Acts of True Faith can also cleanse the Garou, but the effects of these are entirely in the hands of the Storyteller. Beings with True Faith are rare, and the miracles required to cleanse a Garou are even rarer. It might require the faithful to endanger his own soul (risk possible taint himself) to save the Garou.

The only sure method of removing full taint is to bathe in the Silver Lake in Erebus (see **Umbra: the Velvet Shadow**). This will remove one Corruption dot per year spent in the burning waters, but will eventually burn out all taint. However, if the Garou has a 10 Corruption when entering the waters, he will die, but his soul will be cleansed.

Corruption	Minimum wrongdoing for Corruption roll
1	Accidentally breaking a Litany law; living in a city.
2	Purposefully breaking a Litany law; refusing a rightful challenge; cannibalism (eating the flesh of humans or wolves); disattunement of spirit (failure to regain a Gnosis point within a month of spending it).
3	Refusing to acknowledge loss of a challenge (loss of instinct); teaching the Ways (Gifts, rites) to Wyrm minions (including vampires and Ronin-ikthya); stealing Gnosis from a non-Wyrm spirit who is not allied to the Garou.
4	Making no attempt to atone for your banishment; unjustly killing another Garou; betraying a Garou to Wyrm minions; stealing Gnosis from a spirit allied to the Garou.
5	Working for Pentex (non-Monkeywrenching); binding or trafficking with spirits to evil purpose; stealing Gnosis from Banes.
6	Destroying a natural place (harming Gaia); causing a Blight to grow or fester.
7	Allying with Wyrm minions (including vampires and Ronin-ikthya); undergoing the ritual of Sacred Rebirth (Skin-Dancer). (The Gift: Sense Wyrm will detect any Garou with 7 or higher Corruption.)
8	Cannibalism (eating the flesh of another Garou); skinning a Garou (Skin-Dancer); sadism and perversion (Black Spiral Dancer virtues)
9	Betraying the location of a caern; warring against any of the tribes.
10	Destroying a caern.

Gifts

The Storyteller and players are encouraged to come up with new Gifts for their Ronin characters, depending on the Ronin's success when dealing with spirits or Banes. The Storyteller should always remember that the Wyrm will teach new Gifts to Ronin, but always at a cost. Every use of a Wyrm Gift will require the character to make a Corruption roll (see above). However, the character may not know he is getting more and more tainted. The Storyteller alone should determine if the spirit teaching new Gifts is actually a Bane in disguise.

Note: Ronin characters begin with the same amount of Gifts as other Garou (breed, auspice). Choose which tribe the character has been exiled from; the character's third Gift should be chosen from that tribe.

• **Hide the Wolf (Level One)** — A Garou with this Gift can temporarily hide all signs of his Rage, including the subtle, instinctual signs which often spook humans and wolves. In this way, the Garou can live among them without suffering the Curse. However, the sight of the Garou in Crinos form will still activate the Delirium in humans. This Gift is taught by a Raccoon- or Chameleon-spirit.

System: The Garou spends one Gnosis point and rolls Charisma + Primal-Urge (difficulty 6). Only one success is required. The effect lasts for one scene. However, the Gift is canceled if the Garou spends any Rage points or shapeshifts.

• **Buffalo Run (Level Two)** — The Garou can charge an opponent with amazing speed and devastating force. This Gift is taught by a Buffalo-spirit.

System: The Garou spends one Rage point. This Gift acts as a combat maneuver:

Roll	Difficulty	Damage Actions
Dex + Brawl 7	Strength + Special†	1

† Damage is considered aggravated.

If the attack succeeds, the opponent falls to the ground and is trampled by the attacker. The base damage done equals the attacker's Strength + 4; each success scored on the attack roll above the minimum adds one to this base. Unlike a Body Slam, the character does not damage herself with this maneuver; she is protected by Buffalo-spirit magic. The character must be in Crinos, Hispo or Lopus form to use this maneuver. The character can move her full distance, but she must run in a straight line; weaving around in circles does not build sufficient momentum.

• **Vengeance of the Scorned (Level Two)** — The Garou can turn part of a Garou's (or other shapeshifter's) flesh into silver, causing extreme pain to the opponent. This Gift is taught by a Rat-spirit.

System: The Garou spends one Gnosis point and rolls Rage (difficulty 7). The Garou must first touch the opponent. The area touched will turn to silver for one turn per success.

This will cause excruciating pain to the opponent, adding three to all his difficulties as long as the effect lasts. In addition, the opponent suffers the normal Gnosis penalty for carrying silver. The opponent must also make a frenzy roll for each turn he is affected.

• **Elude the Posse (Level Three)** — The Garou using this Gift is transported to another location — via the Umbra — no less than 10 miles from her original location. However, she cannot necessarily control where she arrives. This Gift is taught by Wyld-spirit.

System: The Garou spends one Gnosis point and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). Only one success is required. However, additional successes allow her to choose her destination.

Successes	Destination
One	Storyteller chooses destination
Three	Character can choose either a city or wilderness, if such exists within 10 miles.
Five	Character chooses destination
Botch	Character is "caught" sideways (see pp. 175-176 of the Werewolf rulebook)

• **Raven's Wings (Level Three)** — The Garou with this Gift may send a portion of her spirit out of her body in the form of a raven. The raven can see and hear, but it cannot affect the physical world. It is invulnerable to attacks, however. This Gift is taught by a Raven-spirit.

System: The Garou spends one Gnosis and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 6). The raven may be sent five miles away for every success on the roll. If it goes past this range, the Gift is canceled. While this Gift is in use, the Garou must concentrate to use the raven's senses and may take no other actions in the same turn he is communing with the raven.

Skin-Dancer Gifts

• **See Past the Skin (Level One)** — A Garou who uses this Gift may detect a Skin-Dancer from the mystical marks faintly present on her fur, resembling scars or stitch-marks. This Gift is used by the Skin-Dancers to detect one of their own. The 13 tribes do not know this Gift; they use Sense Wyrm instead to root out Skin-Dancers among them. This Gift is taught by a Magpie-spirit.

System: The Garou rolls Gnosis (difficulty 6). Only one success is required.

Note: The Gifts: Scent of the True Form (Philodox) and Sense the Unnatural (Lopus) will reveal a Skin-Dancer as a Garou, but will not reveal her membership in the Forbidden Tribe.

• **Mask Taint (Level Five)** — A Garou with this Gift may completely hide his Wyrm-taint from all senses, including Gifts that detect such taint. This Gift is taught by a Puppeteer Bane.

System: The Garou spends one Gnosis point and rolls Appearance + Subterfuge (difficulty 8). The effect lasts for one scene. Every time this Gift is used, the Garou must roll one die. If the number is equal to or less than her Corruption Trait, she adds one to her Corruption, gaining more Wyrm taint. This Gift cannot be used by Garou with Corruption 10.

Skin-Dancer Rite

The Ritual of Sacred Rebirth (Level Five Mystical)

This rite allows the caster to become a Garou, but only after successfully gathering the skins of five Garou. Each of these skins must be prepared using an ointment made of very rare herbs and minerals, and each must be taken under the same moon stage. This ritual can take an incredible amount of time to prepare, and the pelts of the Garou must be constantly preserved under the same moon sign they were killed under. The pelts may be years apart, so long as they are always preserved in the proper way.

The final ceremony must again come under the same moon stage and must be completed in under one hour. The caster rolls Wits + Rituals against a difficulty of 9. Only one success is required. At the end of the ceremony, the skins of the five victims will merge into the caster, forever becoming a part of the caster's body. There is no known reversal for this ritual. When completed, the caster will be Garou. He will be tainted by the Wyrm (Corruption 7, see above), unless the Garou willingly gave of their skins for him.

Fetishes

Ronin Garou can create their own fetishes if they know the proper rites, but they face several potential pitfalls in the process. The Garou must prepare the potential fetish in the traditional way (see *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* rulebook) and must also convince or trick a spirit into inhabiting the fetish. But the Wyrm thrives on fooling solitary Garou. Unless the Ronin has the Gift: Sense Wyrm, a Bane is likely to take the place of what would normally be a willing spirit.

Below are several examples of Fetishes created by Ronin to aid them in their lonely lives. Some are Wyrm-tainted, and some are not.

Growler

Level 4, Gnosis 5

This long, jagged knife is similar to a klawie, but is not as well-crafted. It will cause aggravated damage to any opponent it strikes and often growls as it sinks into the target's flesh. Growlers are not silver; Garou may soak their damage normally. The difficulty to attack with a Growler is 6, and it inflicts Strength + 1 damage.



SB TW



To create a Growler, a Garou must bind a spirit of War, Pain, Rage or a Wolf-spirit. If a Bane is bound instead, it will eventually turn on its user. The first time the user botches an attack roll, the blade will reverse itself and sink into his flesh, growling as it bites. The Bane will then flee the fetish and Reform elsewhere in the Umbra, leaving the fetish useless.

War Drum

Level 4, Gnosis 7

This tiny wood and leather drum is worn close to the heart. It is activated by thumping upon it and will grant one Rage point to the user for every success on the activation roll. This power can only be used once per day. The spirit of a War Drum is normally friendly, but there are exceptions. If the spirit was tricked or forced into the War Drum, it will drive the character into a frenzy if he botches his activation roll.

To create a War Drum, a spirit of War or Rage must be bound into the Drum. Bitter Rage Banes often try to imitate War-spirits.

Wyrm Mirror

Level 2, Gnosis 7

A Wyrm Mirror is a plate of silver in a bone frame. It is used to detect the Wyrm's presence. By catching the reflection of the desired object or person and successfully activating the fetish, the Garou will see an eerie green glow around anything tainted by the Wyrm, including himself if his Corruption rating is 7 or higher. The brighter the glow, the stronger the Wyrm's presence. The mirror cannot see Banes unless they have Materialized.

Creating a Wyrm-Mirror requires the willing assistance of a Lune or water-spirit. Unwilling spirits will still do the task required of them, but the fetish will only work with the expenditure of one Gnosis point. Banes infesting the Wyrm Mirror will falsify the reflections, hiding any taint on the user of this fetish.

Renowned Ronin

Fights-With-Honor

Fights-With-Honor was the first metis to ever demand his right to join with the tribe who banished him because of his breeding. When he was old enough to survive on his own, the Ronin who would later become Fights-With-Honor was expelled from his tribe and left to manage his way in the world by himself. For several years, he fought alongside the people of his sept, answering all calls for help and battling against the Wyrm. His deeds were noticed but went unrecognized. Every attempt at communication was ignored, even by his parents.

In the winters, he grew lean from near-starvation, as hunting near the caern was a right denied him by the tribe. Like all metis in those days, he was a non-entity. Fights-With-Honor grew enraged when he saw another metis banned for the same reason he had been banned: because his parents had broken the Litany.

He challenged not only for the right to return to his tribe, but in order to protect the younger Ronin from sharing his fate. After meeting and defeating the Master of the Challenge for the right to speak to the elders of the tribe, he challenged for the right to stay with his people, demanding further boons if he should succeed in the tasks placed before him. His trials are unrecorded, but his success is well-known.

Some say he fought all of the Ahrouns of his sept, matching even the most ferocious in combat. Some say he recited the Litany in its full form, proving his knowledge of the Garou and his ability to learn even that which most felt was beyond him. Some say he solved the riddle of the Sphinx and the Chimera both. Whatever the truth of his great challenge, he succeeded. From that day forth, all metis had the right to remain with their tribes.

Fights-With-Honor died only hours after his tests were completed, murdered by one of the sept who could not tolerate his existence. Still, his legacy lives on. While the truth is lost in the shadows of the past, all tribes number Fights-With-Honor as one of their greatest heroes.

Falling-Star-of-the-Morning-lurf

Falling-Star defied the Garou from the moment of her First Change. She refused their ways and denied her heritage among the Black Furies. Every attempt to discipline her was rewarded with violence. After trying to make her understand the Ways of the Garou for almost five years, the elders had no choice but to banish her from sept and tribe alike. Her final crime was the brutal and unprovoked murder of one of the tribal elders. She gave no defense for her actions, instead choosing to defy the Black Furies to the bitter end. Several of the sept's leaders were prepared to kill her on the spot, but Old-Seer stayed their vengeance by explaining that Falling-Star still had much to accomplish.

Falling Star turned from the tribe and walked away with her head held high, proud of her individuality. She fought the Wyrm, often taking hideous risks to stop its minions single-handedly. Her trials were many, and though the offer was made to allow her back into the tribe on several occasions, she always refused. Though seen only sporadically for the next decade, she made clear to all who ran across her that she was no longer welcome among the Garou and that she did not care. Eleven years after her exile, Falling-Star-of-the-Morning returned to the Crystal Waters Sept in time to aid them in their battle against the minions of the Wyrm.

Wyrmplings attacked the sept in great numbers, led by the great Bane Tiamat. Falling-Star came to the caern's aid bearing a powerful fetish, the Spear of Artemis, long thought lost to the tribe. Using the Spear, she managed to destroy Tiamat, but not before the foul creature's venomous bite had crippled her. Falling-Star-of-the-Morning was crushed beneath the falling Bane's terrible weight.

She never explained why she came back to save the tribe she so despised, just as she refused to explain why she felt such hatred for them in the first place. All the same, her deeds were many and her acts of bravery were an example to all who met her. She will always be remembered.



Book Three: The Hollow Ones

Seeking the Hollow Truth

*One for sorrow
Two for joy
Three for girls
and Four for boys
Five for silver
Six for gold
Seven for the secret never to be told*
— Anonymous, “A Murder of Crows”

The wind and rain sliced across Brent Veer’s face, the chill air adding an extra sting with each drop that struck his flesh. San Francisco was abysmal, nothing like he’d seen in the postcards. Perhaps it would be better in the day’s light, with the sun shining and the clouds dispersed again. He had traveled from Westbrook, Maine, all the way across the

country, hitching rides and often simply walking, to find the building before him. The St. Francis Church was reportedly the place where he would find the Waydown, the most powerful of all the Hollow Ones’ Chantries. There were no signs to indicate that the building was inhabited; in fact it looked about ready to be condemned. But that was all right, he hadn’t expected much else. The idea of a well-lit building with banners announcing the Chantry’s presence just didn’t fit with anything the Hollow Ones did.

Up ahead, towards the top of the stairs, a headless statue of Saint Francis stood with arms outstretched, facing the street. In the darkness that enveloped the building, he could see a few tattered yellow ribbons, all bearing the legend: POLICE LINE. DO NOT CROSS. Other than the wind-stirred flutterings of the police banners, there was no movement. He stepped forward, excited that he would, at long last, be able to meet the leaders of his Craft. He had been alone for so long; there were few people in Maine who believed as he did, let alone in Westbrook.



Brent slipped past the police warnings, pushing open a door at the side of the church, well away from the main street entrance. Water ran from his body in small rivers down his black clothes and dampening the floor beneath his feet. He felt his expectations plummet. The church was almost completely dark; no candles lit his way. In the faint light that spilled from the high windows, he could see rows of pews gathering dust against the walls. The center of the church had been cleared and the pulpit covered with a funerary shroud. Candelabras stood in all the corners, silhouettes against the greater darkness. He reached into his pocket, seeking a book of matches, but found only sodden cardboard instead. The rain had soaked through to his skin long ago, and his single pack of matches had been transformed into so much crap along the way.

He surveyed the empty chamber, grinning slightly, and decided the time had come to do a little magick. He focused on the candles in their stands and murmured, "Let there be light."

The wicks of all the candles glowed briefly and then erupted into flames. The room before him changed to reflect the light, and he squeezed his eyes half-closed, watching the colors come back from where they had hidden in the darkness. "And it was good."

"Adequate, really," someone said from a pew along the wall behind him. "Not something worth writing home about."

Brent turned to find the source, his heart thumping at twice its normal speed, and saw a girl near his own age. She was dressed in antiquities, a lace frock dyed black and decorated with a variety of costume jewels and pearls, all subdued against the dress. A black cat sat beside her on the pew, preening itself and staring at him with luminous green eyes.

"My, do you suppose his mother knows where he is?" The cat was the one doing all the talking, but this last was directed to the girl at its side.

"You're being rude, Mistoffeles."

"Rude is relative. He didn't knock, and I know you never sent him an invitation."

"Um..., is that cat talking?" Brent could not help staring.

"No," replied the cat. "I'm simply moving my lips while she fakes the words for me. You have eyes, don't you? Do you see strings attached to my body at any point?"

"You'll have to forgive Mr. Mistoffeles," the girl apologized. "He can be exceedingly rude when the mood strikes him." She paused a moment, standing up from the pew and walking toward him as the cat went back to contorting its body in an effort to clean the most inaccessible spots. Brent envied the cat's laid-back attitude. He was rather nervous himself.

"I'm Penny," she said. "Welcome to the St. Francis. Or rather, all that's left of it."

"The St. Francis? I thought this was the Waydown."

"It is, but only for special occasions."

"Oh. I'm sorry, I'm being rude. My name's Brent, Brent Veers. It's nice to meet you, Penny."

"Hi, Brent. Why were you looking for the Waydown?" Her question was direct, and Brent wondered if Penny was one of the Chantry leaders.

Brent recited the lines he'd practiced since leaving home, hoping they would have the proper effect. "I've come to learn more about the Hollowers, where we come from and what rules we're supposed to follow. How do we deal with other mages? I don't know about how it is around here, but in Maine the Hollowers aren't very well-accepted." He wanted to stop when he realized he was babbling, so his clamped his lips shut and tried his best to look at ease. By the look on Penny's face, he wasn't doing very well.

"You want to know about our rules?" she sounded confused.

"Well, yes. Isn't this the Waydown? The greatest of Hollow One Chantries? The place where all the followers of the Hollow Tradition meet every year?"

"Well, yes and no. Yes, this is the Waydown, although only occasionally as I stated before, and then mostly just for the special events, like All Hallow's Eve and now and then for a Candlemas celebration. No, I wouldn't call this a Chantry, not anymore at least. And I really doubt that all the — what did you call it? 'Followers of the Hollow Tradition?' — meet here. There'd be no room. This is just a place to meet and talk. A weekend hang-out if you prefer."

"Enough, Penny." The voice was chilling, a razor-cut of frost across Brent's spine. "I don't believe the man has proved his right to know our ways." Brent was certain he did not want to know the face of whatever spoke from the shadows.

"What do I have to do to prove myself?" Brent said. For once, his voice sounded more confident than he could have hoped. "Name your challenge."

"We've seen you do parlor tricks, boy. Now do something worth noticing."

"Neville—" Penny started, but was cut off by a sharp hiss of air.

"The boy is a mage." Mistoffeles had opened one eye, staring into the distant shadows. "Get on with this, please, I'm growing bored."

"Well, that's good enough for me at least," Penny said. Brent's confusion must have shown on his face, because she smiled and led him over to the pew she'd left a minute before. "Here. I'll tell you what, why don't you ask me a few questions, and if I can, I'll answer them."

"That is not our way, Penny," Neville said. "He could be anyone. There are many who qualify as mages, but few who can claim to be a Hollower."

Another voice called out from the darkness, this one softer, more of a whisper than a threat. "Would you so easily tell our secrets to a Marauder or a Nephandus? How can you be certain that he is not a spy sent to destroy us? Before you trust anyone, Penny, make him prove his worth."

Penny sighed noisily. "I think you're all being paranoid."

The silence that followed was uncomfortable, and Brent began wondering what he'd gotten himself into.

"We accept that he is a mage, Penny. But there are many among the Awakened who would be very happy to see us all dead." Neville's voice was scolding, that of a parent who had caught a child talking with a stranger. "If you've any flaw, it's that you are too trusting."

Penny seemed annoyed by the comment, but kept her mouth shut. Another voice floated out of the darkness, masculine and jovial. "Where did you learn about the Waydown?"

"Um..." Brent fumbled, "a girl named Seraphim told me about it. She's in Boston." He felt the weight of eyes staring at him from the shadows. "She said this was the best place to learn about the Hollow Ones, and that I could maybe become a part of the Tradition if I played my cards right."

"Seraphim lied to you," the voice stated. "Also, I've been to Boston. I've never seen you there. Where are you from?" The good cheer was still in the voice, but laced with menace. Brent felt sweat breaking out in spite of the wet.

"I'm from Westbrook, Maine. I'm the only mage I ever met until last week, when I was in Boston. What do you mean, Seraphim lied?"

"Just what I told you, Brent. She lied. We aren't a Tradition. How can you become a part of something that does not exist?"

Brent sighed and looked around the room, trying to distinguish the locations of his inquisitors. "Look, all I can tell you is what she told me. She said I could learn more about the Hollow Ones by coming out to San Francisco and talking to the leaders of the Waydown. She said that everyone comes to the Waydown sooner or later. Well, here I am. If you can't help me, then I guess I'll go back home." Brent stood and started towards the door.

"We didn't say we couldn't help you, but you've not given us a reason to help you either." Neville again. Truly, he sounded hollow.

"If you want money, you're out of luck. I don't have any." Brent felt his temper starting to rise. "I spent the last of it three days ago in Vegas. If you want me to perform a test, then just say what you want done and let's get on with it. If you want a letter of introduction, then you can kiss my ass."

"Ooh! He's got a burr up his butt now, doesn't he, Baron?" It was the voice of the whisperer, and Brent felt certain the speaker was female by the inflections in the faint words.



"I'd say so, Sascha. Perhaps he'd like to run on home to Mommy now."

"Perhaps you'd like to come out where I can see you, and say that to my face." Brent's anger was starting to build, and he looked around in the shadows again, searching now for the one voice that seemed to mock him the most, the cheerfully threatening source of his present rage — Baron.

A gleaming comet streaked through the air and crashed between his feet. When Brent looked down to where the missile had landed, he saw the hilt of an ornamental dagger vibrating at the end of a blade buried an inch in the hardwood floor.

"Perhaps you'd like to find me and make me, Brent. Do you think you can do that?"

Brent willed the lights from the candles to burn much brighter, and the flames responded. The darkness faded from the interior of the old church, and he looked around. He saw only Penny, her cat and himself. He let the light fade down to normal after only a moment, fearing to attract too much attention.

"Hey, I'm impressed." The mocking voice came from behind him, but as soon as he turned, he heard the sounds coming from another part of the church instead. "I was all of three before I learned that trick."

Rather than play more tricks with the candlelight, Brent focused instead on the sound of his enemy's voice. He concentrated and moved himself to where the voice was. He did not walk, but simply warped space to accommodate his needs. Without thinking, he lashed out with his hand, and felt his knuckles scrape across coarse hair. Just as quickly, the body he'd touched vanished, and Baron's voice called from across the room. "Very good. Much better than I'd expected. I was afraid you were going to cry."

Brent didn't answer. He simply waited in the darkness.

Finally, Neville called out, "Well done. You may ask Penny your questions now."

Penny beamed and nodded. "Yeah, maybe Neville will even let me answer them."

There was a pause, and Neville spoke again, "Maybe is right. He's earned a few answers, but not all of them."

Just like that, the test was over. If it had really been a test at all. Whatever the case, they seemed willing to deal with him, and that was all that really mattered. Brent rushed to collect his thoughts. "Um, okay. Jeez, where to begin... All right, how about this: Who are we? Why are we? How long have the Hollow Ones been running around?"

A voice joined in from further back in the church, and Brent looked up to see another woman approaching. Her attire was far less subdued than Penny's, and her voice was almost brash in comparison; not the whisperer, but another girl. He still wasn't certain just how many people he was dealing with. "Since the mages first walked among the

Sleepers. We have always been. We just never felt it necessary to wave a banner or demand a seat with the Tradition mages." Brent wasn't certain, but he thought he heard Penny snort out a gust of air, attempting to stop her laughter. If that was the case, she hid it well behind a cough. "Hi, Brent. I'm Blackrose." Her attitude was such that Brent half-expected her to raise her hand for him to kiss in supplication.

He made his greeting in return, then looked around in surprise as he realized still more of the Goth-mages were stepping from the shadows. The introductions were handled by Penny, whose full name was Penny Dreadful, a moniker she preferred to the one on her driver's license. Sascha was the other woman present, a heavy-set girl who giggled nervously, to the perpetual annoyance of those around her, and wore thick kohl around her eyes in the same style as the royal families of ancient Egypt. He recognized her as the whisperer. Next was Peter, a stocky young man with haunted eyes and a scowl that seemed carved into the flesh of his face.

Neville was also introduced, though the closest he came to a greeting was a cold, formal nod of his head. Neville's hair was thin, and the roots matched the blond color of his eyebrows. He was tall and very lean, and he dressed less formally than the others, but still wore black.

The last one hidden in the shadows was Baron. His hair was dyed black, but the scruff on his jaw line also showed a lot of gray mingled with the natural light-brown color that hid beneath the dye. He dressed like a grunge-rocker, though, entirely in black, baggy pants, combat boots and an open vest. Several tattoos adorned his arms and torso, each a different symbol of power. The Weidjet Eye, an inverted version of the Eye of Horus, lay on his chest across from a more traditional depiction of the Eye of Horus. An ankh, a Celtic cross and other symbols that Brent was unfamiliar with all united on his body by an illustrated string of barbed-wire that ran to his torso and wrapped twice around his neck. Interwoven through the more significant tattoos were numerous smaller illustrations that did not seem to belong: dice on his right forearm, a burning man on his left hand, a bleeding rose dripped across his ribcage and was joined by a dozen or more images that were equally out of place among the symbols of power. In the center of the double line etched across his throat was the simple legend: 'Forgive.' He touched the dagger he'd thrown earlier, and Brent watched as the knife melted into a stream of light that reformed as a new tattoo on Baron's left forearm. Where the others were mostly somber, Baron smiled broadly and shook Brent's hand with all the enthusiasm of a politician one week before election day.

They gathered around Brent, a premature grouping of mourners in a desolate church, and began to tell him in snippets and fragments the unwritten history of the Hollow Ones.

History

*Ring around the rosy,
Pockets full of poseys,
Ashes, ashes,
We all fall down*

— Anonymous, traditional nursery rhyme about the Black Plague.

Neville spoke, his voice as chilling as before. "We do not have a recorded history, not like the Council of the Nine Traditions. Just the same, we do indeed have a history of our own. The difference is that no one's ever bothered to write it down, nor have we followed the examples left behind by generations long gone."

"Some among us claim our origins date back centuries, as far back as Rome and the mad ruler Nero. Though there is no proof that Nero was a mage, there can be no doubt that he shared a philosophy with the Hollow Ones: 'The end is near or even here, and it is far better to celebrate an exit from the darkness and despair than to cry tears for what little light remains.' Most of the Traditions scoff at the idea of the Hollow Ones being around for so long, and point to the era of the flappers as the true start of the Hollow Tradition. We know better."

"Many of the Awakened tend to think of the 'Gothmages' as a fairly new phenomenon." Neville's voice fairly dripped sarcasm. "They assume we are merely vampire wannabe's who dress the way we do to entice the other supernatural minions who inhabit this world. In reality, the Followers of the Hollow Tradition have existed in one form or another since the Order of Reason began the Pogrom."

"We came from every faction of mage society in the time of the Ascension War, but mostly we came from the factions that were not accepted by the newly formed Council of Nine Traditions." Neville stared disdainfully at Brent, shaking his head. "I can't do this. I hate telling anyone the history of the Hollow Ones. It's not like there's going to be a test later."

Baron spoke up, taking over where Neville left off. "Those who were rejected or ignored by the Traditions became the first Hollow Ones, but they didn't use that name. They didn't use any names, except the ones chosen for them — the Faithless Ones, the Sepulchral, the Darkeners, the Doubters, the Disparate, the Broken and even the Abandoned — a dozen different titles that changed over the generations. None of the titles were chosen by the Tenth Tradition; rather they were assigned the names by the Traditions and the Order of Reason alike. Most of the lesser Cliques fell into ruin, the individual members going their own ways, falling before the might of the Inquisition or



being absorbed by the better consolidated groups. Those that remained, the unwanted and often reviled, founded what would in later years become the Hollow Tradition."

"You sound like a teacher, Baron." Penny remarked.

"I was a teacher, Penny. Now I'm not. What can I say? Some habits are hard to break. Anyway, as I was saying before.... Throughout the centuries, we have gathered in small groups, macabre celebrants meeting and discussing our own version of the truth." He paused, considering Brent for a long moment, and then asked, "Do you believe in the Ascension?"

Brent shrugged. "I've heard of it. It's where everyone is supposed to think the same way and move on to a better world, right?"

"But do you believe in it?"

"I guess it's possible, but I don't really know if it's probable."

"Wrong. That's the answer to your question. Ascension is different for everyone or just about everyone. It's a myth perpetuated by the Traditions and Conventions to ensure their people stay in line and do as they are told. Some say it's a state of mind for everyone, some say it's personal. I say it's a crock of horse shit. I don't believe there's any such thing."

"Most Hollow Ones say there is no Ascension, nor can there be Ascension until the Traditions cast aside their differences to truly form one consolidated power. Or until the Technocracy can do the same. While the established leaders of the Awakened bickered and complained, the Abandoned reached the conclusion, in Clique after Clique, that the Order of Reason was simply too well-unified to be defeated. Therefore, magick was best learned on an individual basis. There are no established or preferred Spheres for the Hollow Ones, because forcing the studies of one aspect of magickal reality on others would limit the individual's ability to grow on his or her own. But try not to think of studying the Spheres as learning; think of it as remembering."

"The Ascension War was already lost, but perhaps the damage done by the Order of Reason could at least be lessened by teaching others to follow their instincts instead of their minds. Our predecessors believed much as we do today. By allowing yourself to remember what you were once capable of, you can once again achieve greatness."

"Sadly, the great plan that never really was still manages not to be. There aren't enough Sleepers out there who are willing to let themselves go and expand on what we know is real. The Technocratic paradigm still maintains its hold on reality, the Traditions still fight for what they each believe is the only true way, and the Sleepers still refuse to accept that 'truth' — and by extension, magick — is in the eye of the beholder. They still refuse to accept that truth — hell, maybe even the Ascension they all talk about — is waiting inside of us."

All of us. So they have their little squabbles, and all the while, the Darkeners gather, growing in number as each century reaches its end, gathering to celebrate the passing of an era.

"We've always been, just like Blackrose said earlier. The Sepulchral were strong in the Victorian Age, gathering then, as we do now, in flocks that feasted and caroused in the graveyards. They were strong and plentiful when the Black Plague swept through Europe, and their dances — the Dance of Death, the Danse Macabre, Danse des Morts and Totentanz — 'round the funeral pyres are still remembered in nursery rhymes even today."

The Flapper Era: Birth of the Hollow Ones

You are all a lost generation.

— Gertrude Stein to Ernest Hemingway

"But that's all just background material. The 1920s was when we really started making our move and when we finally picked a name for ourselves. The '20s brought new and unexpected challenges, and during that time, many of the more established mages grew disillusioned with their own Traditions. The First World War was over, and many in the United States were celebrating a brave new era for the world, one of prosperity and abundance. The apparent wealth of the country was compounded by a relatively new concept: the ability to buy merchandise on credit. As far as most of the US was concerned, the world was doing better than ever before. With the unbridled enthusiasm people felt, however, a wave of celebrants also came that wanted to go further than anyone ever had before, people who wanted to celebrate their new financial freedom and the end of the war by changing the ways in which the world was viewed.

"Have you ever heard of the Charleston? No, not the candy bar. The Charleston was a wild dance-craze of the time. It came out of Charleston, South Carolina, and swept across the youth culture of the age, shocking the majority of the country with the 'vulgar' moves and gyrations of its participants. Many of the more regular participants who joined in dancing the Charleston and other equally outrageous dances formed their own fashion styles as well and soon became known as flappers. They were about as accepted by adults as the Goths are today.

"Around the same time that the flappers came into vogue, occult magic and spiritualism crept back into the limelight. In England, Aleister Crowley had been stirring the waters of magick since the teens, shocking several of the Traditions with his blatant displays of magickal power and his willingness to accept the Paradox that he suffered and to display them as virtual badges of honor. Contrary to the beliefs of the times, Crowley never filed his teeth; the Paradox spirits took care of the matter for him."

Baron punctuated this statement by cracking open a bottle of Jaegermeister Brent didn't remember seeing before and took a sip.

"Listen, I know there's no solid proof that Crowley was a member of the Hollow Ones, but a lot of mages claim that he was responsible for the Awakening of dozens of Avatars. The blatant displays of magick that Crowley claimed to have accomplished were never seen by the masses, but select groups of his followers accepted his word as gospel and maintained a long list of feats he had allegedly performed before them. The New World Order tried to stop the man on several occasions, but never succeeded. Hell, I've even heard the old bastard is still alive and performing magick even today.

"Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a respected author and investigator, also made many claims about the supernatural at the same time, as did Mina Stinson 'Margary' Crandon, a renowned spiritualist whose claims of contact with the spirit world fascinated and revolted the United States at large in the mid-20s. Fascinated, because everyone was curious, revolted because everything she said went against the religious beliefs of the majority.

"I really think the truest marker of when the Hollow Ones started comes from the reactions that people refuse to dwell on. The '20s also brought forth a whole faction of society that was bitter and filled with hatred for all that went wrong in their world. The media calls the latest culture changes a product of 'Generation X,' another catchy phrase to make up for a lack of understanding. But in the '20s, the same sort of quiet mass rebellion was just as real and just as vivid. 'The Lost Generation' was the name the group earned from Gertrude Stein. She referred to a clique of writers — F. Scott Fitzgerald, ee cummings, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner among them — but she may as well have been referring to almost all of that generation's most influential minds. France became a sort of mecca for a lot of these writers, and Mexico City became their holiday resort when they were actually on this continent. T.S. Eliot seemed to say what every one of them felt when he wrote *The Waste Land*. Read it, you won't be disappointed. Hemingway even took Stein's phrase as a sort of badge of honor. In his book, *The Sun Also Rises*, he used her comment as the main point of impact in the novel's conclusion. Most people tend to think of the Lost Generation as just a group of expatriates and writers, but they were examples of what many of their generation felt. Most of them ended up with ruined livers and died in an alcoholic stupor. The same could happen to Generation X if it's not careful. I think the Technocracy would like that.

"The '20s also saw the first serious studies in parapsychology. The Boston Society for Psychical Research and the British College of Psychic Science both came into existence around the same time, but they were preceded by the Istitut



Metaphysique International in Paris. All of these organizations swelled in popularity and grew in size throughout the '20s and into the '30s, but ceased to exist during the 1940s. The Society for Psychical Research, founded in London, England, in 1882 and the American Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1884, both started studying the occult. Those two were the first serious efforts to understand the world that existed beyond the Sleepers' narrow views of reality. Some say Duke University was first, but I've always believed Duke was a puppet of the Technos. Anyway, that's where most of the Traditions get the notion that we started gathering only this century. I'd say the changes had a strong impact on the growing Hollow Tradition, but I don't believe that's when we started.

"An interesting side-note for you on the continued existence of the SPR and the ASPR. Both were able to gain recognition despite all attempts by the Technocracy to stop their growth. Most of the more learned Hollow Ones also note that these two organizations changed their method of operation around the same time that the groups founded in the '20s faded from existence. Try this theory on for size: The Technocracy was unable to stop the fanaticism of these groups, so instead they tried to turn them to more scientific methods of research. By the mid-1940s, both groups had turned towards the Technocracy to a certain extent, concentrating more on telepathy and the powers of the mind, rather than traditional spiritualistic research. While both maintain their continuous research in areas the Conventions would rather see ignored, they do so in ways that have failed to successfully prove the existence of extra-sensory perceptions.

"No one here, or in the Hollow Ones at large, believes the sudden change of targeted studies in these organizations is just coincidence. And as Neville pointed out to me just last week, the records of both the British College of Psychic Science and the Istitut Metaphysique International disappeared around the end of World War Two. Nope, if that's all just a fluke, I'm Mary Poppins."

Baron paused long enough for another swallow of his Jaegermeister before continuing. "While the attempt to 'legitimize' true studies of magick failed, the fervor of the 1920s lived on. The Roarin' Twenties brought a new outlook on the world in many ways. Prohibition became a part of the United States' way of life, technology continued to find new ways to improve the lives of people everywhere, and radio became an integral part of the American Dream. Money seemed to be available for everyone, and even the poorest families had enough food to keep their children fed. Or so the stories go.

"But the morals of the United States seemed to be on the decline. Along with the flappers came new styles of clothing. Dresses that fit snugly to the body and exposed the legs were worn in public for the first time since the United

States became a free country. Women cut their hair as short as men and drank booze and smoked cigarettes in public, albeit in speakeasies, as drinking liquor was still against the law. And for the first time in US history, women didn't ask for the same rights as men, they demanded them. The Church reeled with shock, unable to accept the changes in morality, condemning the new cults that sprang from nowhere and which became prevalent along the West Coast, especially in California. The Adamites are one example of the types of cults that sprang up. The founders of this order claimed they were Adam and Eve of Biblical fame and held large orgies in the backyard of their home in Oroville, California. Hollywood, even then a growing mecca for the fledgling film industry, also gathered several cults, including the infamous Temple of Set, founded in Malibu during the '20s and destroyed under unknown circumstances in the late '40s. Allegedly, the Temple of Set believed in and practiced human sacrifice.

"So it was from these disparate groups that a number of newly Awakened mages came, untrained by and often contemptuous of the Traditions. The Verbena were the first to notice the growing numbers of Orphans and made several efforts to enlist them within their own Chantries. It soon became apparent, however, that these new mages did not want to follow the beliefs of the Verbena, preferring instead to go about magick as they had learned it, by instinct and through their own research.

"When Astria Moonshade, a renowned Verbena leader in Los Angeles, confronted a group of these Orphan mages, demanding to know where they came from, Neville Sinclair — our Neville here — smiled and quoted from T.S. Eliot: 'We are the Hollow Men. We have always been here.' From that simple quote came the name still carried by the Hollow Ones today. The Verbena used the name first, and after that it just sort of stuck.

"The Traditions were not the only ones to notice the Awakening Orphans. The New World Order worked rapidly behind the scenes in American politics. The Federal Bureau of Investigation came into existence. The NWO took full advantage of the group. A good number of the raids on speakeasies and warehouses allegedly storing illegal alcohol were actually well-orchestrated attacks against the more careless mages of the time. The era that birthed the Hollow Ones also saw several the first major coups on the part of the NWO.

"The continuing increase in political power held by the Technocracy seemed to downplay the significance of the new Hollow Ones through much of the '30s, leading the Traditions to ignore the increasing numbers of Orphan mages that banded together. A second brief substantial increase in numbers came about during the Second World War, when the Allies and the Axis powers both turned to the occult as a possible means of winning the war.

"While the Hollowers did not have a substantial impact on the war itself, the increased awareness of magick apparently had an effect on the neo-Tradition. Orphans started Awakening with surprising regularity.

"It was also during the years directly before and during World War Two that the Hollow Ones learned of their own mistakes. Many of the non-Tradition mages had started with the fledgling cults that cropped up in the '20s and had performed rites with those cults that came back to haunt them. Fully a third of the Hollowers had managed to barter their souls before they even Awakened, and World War Two was the ideal time for the Nephandi to collect. The more careless among the Hollow Tradition had used their magickal talents to avoid aging and soon discovered that the United States military — aided by the FBI — was not above drafting men in their 40s, 50s, and 60s if the men looked to be in their teens. Several of the most influential of the founding members were dragged away to military prisons, while others were sent off to war. A few of the more determined Hollowers used vulgar magick to escape from their new lives, but soon discovered that the NWO was keeping a close eye on every move they made.

"By the time the war ended, those who had carelessly bartered their souls away learned that the Devil always takes his due. The Hollowers also learned to fear the Technocracy as never before, and, to this day, many are convinced that the Conventions have been almost completely infiltrated by the Nephandi.

"As with World War One, the end of the Second World War brought renewed enthusiasm to the United States. It also brought a new generation of rebellious youths determined to oppose the ideals of their parents. The baby boomers just couldn't live the way their parents had, because their parents never had the threat of a nuclear bomb hanging over their heads. Well, more than that, really, there was also the Communist threat to consider and a level of paranoia almost never experienced before in the US. Rhythm and blues and rock and roll brought new levels of grief between parent and child as the baby boomers grew into adolescence and started reveling in ideals their parents could not and would not understand.

"Senator Joseph McCarthy made his presence known to the world at large around the same time and brought grief to the Cult of Ecstasy and the Hollow Ones simultaneously. Both groups held power in certain parts of California, and both were the targets of McCarthy's House Committee on Un-American Activities. A good number of innocent people were brought to ruin by the HUAC. The New World Order used McCarthy and the HUAC as a method of flagging potential threats to the paradigm and located numerous mages this way. Sorcerers in Hollywood and in several other cities were monitored carefully and often captured or killed as soon as they attempted to use vulgar magick. A lot of

Hollow Ones died during the late '40s and early '50s. Unlike the other groups noticed and hunted, a lot of them were ignorant of just how dangerous the Technocracy was and still is.

"The second major expansion of the Hollowers came about at the same time, growing out of the beatnik movement. Almost as many died or were captured, but the survivors started wising up and finally got smart enough to warn other Hollowers about the dangers they all faced.

"In the '60s, the Hollow Ones once again stayed near the periphery of the Cult of Ecstasy. While the Ecstasy mages sang of the Age of Aquarius, the Sepulchral danced to a darker drummer and sang of wanting to paint it black. In that era especially, violence often crept into our society, and anger was the rule rather than the exception.

"Very little changed for us over the next few decades. We continued on our way, learning more about magick and the factions that controlled mage society, while learning to avoid being caught in the midst of the Traditions' troubles with the Technocracy.

"Through the '70s and the early part of the '80s, the Hollowers' ranks grew steadily as a result of the New Age mentality. The occult once again came into vogue on a large scale, but with far less flamboyancy than it had in the '20s. But I need to clarify something here: the New Age philosophies made it a little easier for Sleepers to Awaken, but it sure as hell didn't have much of an impact on us. The New Agers are hopeful dreamers. I've never met any member of the Hollow Ones with a tenth the enthusiasm. Hollow Ones who dwell on optimistic dreams don't normally hang around with other Hollowers for very long.

"No big surprise, the Nine Traditions took note of the increase in numbers, and discussions started about what should be done to curb the growth-rate of this 'potentially dangerous' group. The Cult of Ecstasy held to the belief that the Awakening of so many Orphan mages, and the unconscious groupings they formed, were signs that Ascension is still possible and becoming more likely all the time. The Cult and the Hollowers shared many viewpoints during the mid-'60s to early '70s, often moving in the same social cliques. That alone brought a level of sympathy from the Cult. But the Ecstasy mages were not alone in their thinking; the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena, along with the Akashic Brotherhood all agreed that the Hollow Ones should be accepted as a growing and potentially important faction of mage society. I guess they all had their reasons, but the best I can figure is that those four Traditions are the most nature-oriented of the Nine. They all accepted the fact that we are not aberrations, but only another part of what the Fates have decreed.

"The strongest opponents of the Hollow Ones argued that the Orphan Clique was potentially a danger to them all. The Order of Hermes stridently called for an end to the



group, stating that forcing the self-Awakened mages to join with the Nine Traditions was the only safe way to assure that we didn't become pawns of the Nephandi or the Technocracy. The Euthanatos Tradition agreed, pointing out the increased number of Marauders that seemed to occur in growth-spurts identical to increases occurring in the Hollow Ones.

"Both the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts maintained that our ignorance of the Technocracy and our chaotic organization would likely lead to increased danger for all of the Traditions as well, and cited the witch-hunts inspired by Senator McCarthy and the persecution of their own Traditions as perfect examples of the dangers the Hollow Ones represented. The Celestial Chorus made no comments during the meeting and merely listened to what the other Traditions had to say. In the end, however, the Council of Nine could not make a decision on what should be done and so instead continued to observe the actions of the Hollowers. I don't think they'll ever make up their minds. I don't think they know how."

The Millennium Bird

Seven birds, seven omens

Black of feather

White of soul

Watch them gather

In the Twilight of the Age

Fear their coming, and rejoice

And listen to the stories they tell

For few will see their like again

—Kevin Andrew Murphy, "The Black-Winged Flock"

"Many have questioned the growing numbers of Orphans," Baron continued. "And, more specifically, the disproportionate numbers of Hollowers. The responses have been many and varied from the Hollow Ones themselves, but the two that stand out the most have both pointed to the end of the Millennia. The Hollow Ones can point to the end of each century and clearly mark the increase in their numbers. They also make reference to the Millennium Bird, an avian that shows with the passing of every thousand years. In the times of Christ, there was a Dove. In the times of Helen of Troy, there was a Swan. Now, as the second Millennia After Dominion comes to a close, they point to the latest incarnation of the Millennium Bird, the Crow. The Hollow Ones gather as never before, because the time of the Crow is upon us."

"Jesus," Brent sighed. "It doesn't sound like there's much reason for us to exist. I mean, if all we do is hang around, what's our purpose? What purpose does the Hollow Tradition serve?"

"The Hollow Ones? The 'Hollow Tradition?' Who are we?" Neville sniffed disdainfully, his cold eyes empty except for a light of ancient intelligence. "We are the Hollow Men, the Stuffed Men, the folk of rags and tatters, the crows of the battlefield and the beggars at the gate. We have nothing that isn't lost, discarded or stolen, scarecrow figures patched together with twine and children's rhymes. Scarecrows and the crows themselves, ravens and magpies, taking the lost and forgotten and discarded bits as our own. Here a penny, there a penny — hist, whist, take what no one wants anymore. We are the mourners who prepare the dead for burial and the thieves who steal the coins from their eyes. Yet not until they pay the ferryman, for we are nothing without the dead and that which has passed before. We are the Forgotten Tradition, pieced together from the rags and tatters every of age. The beggars who have come to town, in rags and tatters and velvet gowns."

Neville studied Brent for a long while. "It's been some time since I've had to make that speech. Are you sure that you have come to the right place? Most of our kind simply know."

Brent looked around, taken slightly aback, and glanced over at Penny, who smiled, while on her lap the black cat washed its ear. "I—I just didn't know, I—"

"Didn't remember," finished Neville. "Tell me, Brent, that charm you used when you first came here. Where did you find it? Who taught it to you?"

"I ... taught it to myself, I guess. I found it—"

"In the Bible. I know. There are a great many charms there if you know how to look, but for most the words have lost their meaning. I would guess — and it's only a guess; I won't say that it is the truth, that's for others to say — that you were taught those words by your parents, and though you left their religion, you found the truth in the old book. A line here, a line there, skipping songs and counting-rhymes. You found the truth in all of them, and you used them yourself.

"Penny is a master at it. She has a collection of fairy tale books, old books you can never find again and Dover reprints from Barnes and Noble. Do you know anything about fairy tales, Brent? Once they were the tales of gods and heroes, the holy writ of dead religions, the stories that some primitives believed had a life of their own and had to be thanked and offered sacrifices, for they were gods themselves. Then they fell out of fashion. The religions died, and the anthropologists came as the handmaidens of imperialism. They took the sacred stories as their masters had taken the natives' lives and lands.

"All these tales were brought back and published on the cheap, rewritten by those who didn't understand, cut and bowdlerized until they were appropriate for Victorian sensibilities, suitable for children, given to them as cast-offs and hand-me-downs." Neville looked at him long and hard, his

mouth a thin, bitter line. "The stories still remain and the charms and spells within them. A queen drops her blood and an ebony hoop into the snow and gives birth to a daughter with these colors. A prince knows the date when a gate will open in a wall of briars. A boy enters a Cave of Wonders and is cautioned to touch nothing — nothing! — until he gains the object of his quest. Do you hear the magick that is still there? Can you recognize the charms and use them?"

Penny put her hand on Brent's arm, and he almost jumped. "Neville likes to be melodramatic." She rolled her eyes. "It's all just a matter of bits and pieces, nothing fancy. But Neville's been explaining a little bit more about the way of things to me. The stuff we do is the reason everyone else doesn't like us that much. It pisses off the old magickal orders that we picked up a book at the flea market that has the spells of their inner circle of mysteries — or worse yet, figured them out after watching a couple of Disney films. And it pisses off the guys who run things, the Technos, even more, because they thought they'd done such a good job of sweeping everything under the rug."

"Rags and tatters," Neville said.

"But I thought the Hollow Ones were a part of the Council of Nine." Brent shook his head, confused by the answers Penny and all the others had offered to his questions.

"No. We Hollowers have never been a part of the Council, but there have been several attempts by the more vocal members of the Hollow Ones to change that. The Traditions are pretty set in their ways, and are likelier to accept a group like the Virtual Adepts than they are to accept us."

"Why?"

Penny seemed stumped by that one, but Baron spoke up, "Because the Virtual Adepts meet their requirement for joining." His voice was filled with an exuberance that seemed out of place with the clothes he wore. Despite the black, Baron seemed more like a mockingbird than a crow. Brent thought about the comparison for a second and realized that they numbered seven, a murder of crows. He liked the thought.

"Okay, so what are the prerequisites for joining the Nine Traditions?"

Baron shrugged, perching himself on one end of the next closest pew and frowning slightly. Brent had a suspicion the man frowned a lot; his face seemed to settle into it like a man in a comfortable shirt. "Well, it's not like they advertise for admittance, though I understand they used to. One of the prerequisites seems to be following all of their lingo. The Traditions call magick by different names, like the Spheres of Reality. They say there are Nine Spheres, and I'd be willing to bet each of the Traditions follows one Sphere over all the others."

"Well, what are the Nine Spheres?"

Baron shrugged again. "What do I know? I've always tended to look at the big picture rather than focusing on different aspects of a singular reality. Prime, Forces, Matter, Ego, Life, Death, Huey, Dewey and Louie. I've never been all that interested in doing things in the same way as the Traditions. If I were, I would have joined them."

"Well, do the Traditions want us to join them?"

"Some do. Some don't..."

The Hollow Philosophy, Part One: Antiestablishmentarianism as a Way of Life

"As with no other group, we mages are alone. For each mage, the truth of reality is subjective. The Traditions and even the Conventions offer a certain escape from the isolationist studies that eventually lead to Ascension. They offer a sense of community where none would exist otherwise. For the most part, we Orphans lack this sense of community. But many have sought ways to find acceptance just the same, by creating their own sub-cultures. We Hollow Ones are the most noticeable of these Cliques or Crafts. We are so noticeable, in fact, that we are often referred to as the 'Tenth Tradition' in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. And believe me, it is very much a title meant to cause amusement. Despite our lack of any real influence with the Council of Nine or the Inner Circle, both major powers in the Ascension War have been forced to take notice of us, if only because our numbers are growing so much faster than theirs.

"Why is that?" Brent couldn't help but ask. He was afraid something important might be left out.

"Because when people decide their Traditions and Conventions are wrong, they come to us. We accept them, too, unless they are truly and abysmally stupid.

"While both Tradition and Convention mages take note of the Hollow Ones, only the mages of the Technocracy seem to have decided what should be done with us. Most of the Traditions feel differently about the us. While we Hollowers do not follow political guidelines as stringent as the ones held by the Traditions, we do tend to react in similar ways to the attitudes carried by the Nine.

The Akashic Brotherhood

"The Brotherhood seems content to let us find our own way." Baron stood, walking around the battered remains of the Waydown. "They seldom seem to mind our presence one way or the other. I've actually attended one of their little gatherings. I was unimpressed. Nothing flashy or trashy, just a gathering of mages meditating. But to each his own, that's what magick is all about." He paused a moment and, judging by the intense look of concentration on his face, thought carefully about his next words.

The Celestial Chorus

"The Celestial Chorus is a different sort. They seem intent on doing their very best to ignore our existence. Well, there are a lot of mages among the Hollow Ones who are very devout in their religious beliefs, but few who would admit that the Chorus is right in their assessments. In a lot of ways, the Chorus makes sense, and they must be onto something with their beliefs in the One, but I personally believe in a separation of magick and religion. I also believe in a separation of church and state, so I guess I just don't fit into the Celestials' view of reality. My only complaint about the Chorus is that some of their members are too intense. They can't understand the need to relax from time to time.

The Cult of Ecstasy

"There are a lot of mages in the Cult of Ecstasy. That's not very surprising when you consider their methods of practicing magick. There're some who believe the only way to deal with reality is to get stoned off their asses before doing their stuff. I can't say for sure if it's true, but I've heard they suffer from less side-effects when they go for the blatant stunts than other mages. Who knows? Maybe when you're messed-up is the only time you don't really worry about bending the laws of reality. There're lots of Cult members who follow the paths of Tantric magick, carnal knowledge is power and all that. I've always tended to look at carnal knowledge as fun, not as a means to an end. It's too much like prostitution for my tastes, but that's just me. Then there are others who are really into music, and they're a fun bunch to hang with, but they always look for hidden meanings in every song, and I don't just mean the lyrics or parts of recorded music that've been dubbed in reverse. I mean, they look for hidden meanings even in the notes being played and how the notes join together. They look for it in the rhythm of the drums, the tempo of the piece and in the vibrations of the vocalist's voice. Same problem as before. I like to listen to my music for enjoyment, not for hidden meanings."

Dreamspeakers

Baron paused, thinking. Then he began again, "It's like this: the Dreamspeakers are just missing the picture. They've gone halfway there, and now they're lost somewhere along the way. Sure, dreams are important, and spirits can come in very handy in the right situations, but they've forgotten about the real world in the process of getting where they want to be. There are aspects that their philosophies don't cover, at least as far as I'm concerned. I've learned a few routes along the way from the Dreamspeakers, and they're very useful, but they're also limited. They deal with life and everything related to life, but they ignore death and everything related to death. See my point? What's the good of being able to speak with a wind spirit if you can't speak with the spirit of your dear departed Uncle Elmo? Halfway there, and they still can't see the other half of the picture. I still respect them, and they respect us in turn. That's what's really important. Mutual respect for similar ideals.

Euthanatos

"I still don't know what to make of the Euthanatos. Everybody calls them death-mages, but I've never seen one who just randomly blew away somebody on the street. Still, they do have some serious biases. I know they're not fond of Hollow Ones, and I think that's because we have opposite philosophies about a lot of things." Baron, apparently a man who could not be still for long, sat down again and pulled forth a pair of dice.

"How do you figure that?" Brent had always thought the Euthanatos had the right ideas about most things, at least based on what little he knew of them.

Baron looked his way at eye-level, but Brent still got the impression the man was looking down on him. "Okay. Let me ask you a question."

"Shoot."

"Don't tempt me. Why do you dress the way you do?"

"I—" He had to think about that one, and so he stalled for a few seconds by studying his clothes: black dress pants, black tuxedo shirt, black combat boots, hair dyed black and a black bandanna, along with black studded earrings and a silver ankh. "I dress this way to symbolize my dissatisfaction with the corruption and decay of society's moral standards and way of life." Brent smiled to himself, pleased that he'd come up with a solid answer.

"Really? I dress this way because I like the color black and I like baggy clothes."

"But...?"

"What type of music do you listen to?"

"Well, I like Nine Inch Nails, Trio Nocturna, Thrill Kill Kult, Sri Lanka, Das Ich. Stuff like that."

"Mmm-hmmm. Why?"



"Well, just 'cause I do." The man had him on the defensive, and he did not like it.

"Better." Baron stretched and moved his shoulders before continuing. "What you said about your clothes was fairly eloquent and sums up a lot of the neo-Goth mentalities I've heard, but not all of them by a long stretch, and it doesn't begin to touch on the way the Euthanatos feel. Back a few years ago, I had a long talk with one of the more amiable Euthanatos I've met, a guy named Stan Edwards. Stan told me a few things about the death-mages. Yes, they do kill people. They kill a lot of people. But they only kill people who they believe are 'ready to die.' He did clarify a little for me. People who are ready to die can be terminal patients in hospitals who are suffering unnecessarily, or people who are in danger of corrupting their own souls or the souls of others, or people who they sense are supposed to die at a certain point. How they figure this I don't know."

"The thing is, most Hollow Ones I know don't assume to know when it's time for someone to die; it'll happen when it happens. A lot of Hollowers believe that the end-times are upon us, and some just like the color black. Lots of us think the societal decay around us is hideous, others think it's amusing. Some Hollowers like talking with dead people, some think it's dangerous and morbid besides."

Peter spoke up then, his voice bitter and filled with anger. "Some of us don't have a choice. Sometimes the wraiths come to talk with us, and they won't leave us alone." Baron looked at Peter for several long seconds, waiting to see if he would add to what he had already said. Brent didn't like the amused look on Baron's face while Peter was speaking. It was like Baron knew what Peter was talking about and found the other man's suffering humorous.

"But it's not something we try to change in either case. The Euthanatos believe they can change the way the world is running if they kill the right people at the right time. We both see the same problems, but we deal with them differently."

Brent worked on trying to absorb that last, while Baron juggled the dice between his fingers, making them dance around his hand in a corona of flashing numbers. He would, no doubt, be hellishly efficient as a gambler in Vegas.

The Order of Hermes

"The Order of Hermes is convinced that the Hollow Ones are dangerous and should be forcibly disbanded. Why? Because we refuse to follow the same means that they follow to reach the same ends. Members of the Order are big into mathematical equations and carefully working out the details of everything they do before they try to accomplish anything."

Blackrose cut in, "There's a friend of mine — we'll call him 'Alex' — who took on a stuffy old bastard named Aries Michaels in a bet. They each tried to predict exactly what the next three people who entered a hospital emergency room would be suffering from."

"Yeah? Who won?"

"Neither of them, it was a tie. They both predicted exactly what the next three emergency patients would be suffering from, wrote them down on a sheet of paper and handed the papers to me. Michaels saw the papers in my hand, and so did several other people. We were all watching when three victims of a bus accident arrived by ambulance. One concussion, three broken legs and five broken ribs collectively. I showed the papers to the rest of the group, and a tie was declared. But Aries Michaels left in a fit. He'd worked out his little equations on paper, and he got the right answer. What he couldn't understand was how 'Alex' could come up with the right answer by asking a Ouija board. He was convinced that we'd cheated him out of his victory by changing the paper 'Alex' handed in. I think that pretty much sums up the Order of Hermes in a nutshell. They can't understand why our magick works just as well as theirs. So they've collectively decided that we are a danger to the Traditions."

"'Alex' cheated." Peter looked around the room, scuffing the dusty floor with his feet. "He used a ghost to tell him. He had outside help."

Sounding rather defensive about Peter's accusation, Blackrose answered back, "The end result was still the same. It was just a different method of getting the answer."

"I've told you before, Blackrose, dead is dead is dead. Leave the wraiths alone if you know what's good for you. They always want something in return."

Neville joined then, his voice unchanged from his cool, level tones. "The Traditions do not understand that the Hollow Ones are primordial mages. We do not need to learn our magick, only to remember how magick works. Aries Michaels didn't have a problem with how 'Alex' managed to match him, he had a problem with a 17-year-old boy with no formal education being able to match him. All of the Traditions seem to have a problem with that, but none seem to suffer from this annoyance as heavily as the Order of Hermes."

Sons of Ether

Baron spoke again. "The Sons of Ether are a little strange. Most of these guys run around like Dr. Frankenstein, designing the sort of weapons you hear about in science fiction movies from the '50s and ranting to themselves about how they've been cheated of what should rightfully be theirs. No joke here, I heard of one guy who said he built a time machine from a Volkswagen Bug, three calculators and 17 D-cell batteries. Another said he'd built a computer capable of overthrowing the Technocracy out of a diamond with 100 facets, four mirrors, a manual typewriter, about fifty feet of copper wire and a penlight. Then these same guys turn around and say that we're not properly trained, and so we must be a threat to the Traditions." Baron shook his head in disgust.

Verbena

"The Verbena are a lot like the Dreamspeakers and a lot like the Cult of Ecstasy. But not really. They follow similar actions of both, but they don't limit themselves in the same ways. I tend to think of them as the opposite side of the Dreamspeaker problem: they spend too much time worrying about the physical world, and so they forget the spiritual. But they also leave us pretty much to our own devices, except when they go on recruiting campaigns and try to get us to join up with them. No problem, I know a few Hollowers who have been accepted into their ranks."

Virtual Adepts

"The Adepts are really spooky. They can do things with a computer that make the Technocracy nervous and the other Traditions nervous too. I don't trust them; they still think too much like the Tech-Nazis for my tastes. There's another one where the feeling is mutual. They don't like that we can use computers to do a lot of the same things they do and then turn around and pull stunts with Tarot cards that work just as well. It's a matter of personal tastes. I know lots of Hollowers who get along with the Adepts, but I'm not one of them."

"How is it that the Traditions get along at all? It sounds like they don't agree on anything."

Baron opened his hand to reveal the faces of his dice; somehow he'd managed to increase the number of dice from two to seven. Each one revealed a single dot. "It's not so much that they agree on how their Ascension is going to take place. It's more that they all hate the Technocracy more than they hate each other."

The Technocracy

"Is the Technocracy really that bad?"

"Worse."

"So what's the deal with the Technocracy? How could they be all that bad if they're responsible for cars and hospitals and... well, everything? Is it just because they don't believe in performing magick the same way we do?"

Baron gave him that 'what planet did you say you were from, again?' look of his, and Brent felt like crawling under a rock. "It's more than that. If it was just because they believed in using technology-magick instead of any other type of magick there wouldn't be a problem. Well, not much of one, anyway.

"No, the problem is they're even pickier than the Traditions, and they've got nastier ways of letting you know you aren't welcome. The Technos don't just say you shouldn't use magick, they kill you if you use it."

"Kill you? Why?"

Penny interrupted, her voice slightly exasperated. "Baron likes to go for dramatic impact. They'll kill you if you're stupid, but you have to be really, really stupid before it comes to that." Baron turned to Penny, gesturing for her to continue. "Best I can figure, the Technos like to have things running their own way. They don't like other mages, and they don't like anyone breaking the rules of reality. If you break the rules, you can suffer from side-effects — Paradox is what the Traditions call it, and if you want to hang with them it's best to talk their language — and that's bad enough. But if you break the rules too often, or in the wrong places, the Technocracy decides you need to be taught a lesson. Sometimes they'll give you a warning, sometimes they won't. It pretty much depends on who you run across. I do my best to avoid them, and the best way to do that is not to get caught."

"Penny's very good at not getting caught," Baron added dryly. "But she's right, death is almost a worst case scenario."

"Almost?" Brent couldn't imagine much worse than death.

"Yeah. I've heard stories that they're not above using mages as parts of experiments or even blackmailing a mage to rat on his friends." The older mage flipped his dice again (there were only two now), made them vanish, and slid off the pew, once more walking around the inside of the St. Francis. "I've been lucky. I've never been captured, but I can tell you for a fact that I've seen a few mages fall into the Technos' hands, and I've only ever seen one of them get away."

Brent studied his newfound educator's face, noticing the hard lines that developed as he spoke and the almost palpable hatred in his voice. "Only one. The rest were either found dead a few weeks later or never seen again." Brent noticed where the dice on Baron's forearm had once shown a three and a four, they now showed a five and a two.

"Who was the one?"

"None of your damned business!" Baron turned so sharply that his hair lifted from his scalp and fluttered for a second before settling back into place. His eyes were threatening, and Brent could feel the hairs on his own neck lift in anticipation of whatever the man before him intended. Penny sat up straighter in her seat, and Mr. Mistoffelees let out a decidedly feline hiss before bolting across the room and under one of the other pews. Brent could see his eyes glowing in the shadows.

Neville stepped forward, placing one hand on Baron's shoulder and shaking his head. The two traded a long look before Baron, calmer and obviously more in control, turned back to Brent. "My... apologies, Brent. That was uncalled for. I'm still a bit sensitive about that particular subject, so let's just drop it. No hard feelings?"



"N-No. No problem here. I'm sorry if I offended you."

"Think nothing of it. Let's just forget about it and go on with our conversation."

"Deal."

Nephandi

"The most dangerous mages I've ever seen don't work with the Technocracy or with the Nine Traditions. The Nephandi work by themselves, and they work for their demon-masters. Some of them try to convince other mages to join them. Others just try to kill everything they can, as long as they can get away with it." Baron looked over at Penny, who had sobered noticeably with the change of subject. "Stay away from the Diabolists. They'll do everything they can to make you theirs in body and soul. And they're very good at what they do. Aside from death by natural causes, I'd say the Nephandi are the worst thing that ever happened to the Hollow Ones, or any of the other groups of mages for that matter."

"How can they make you their slaves?"

"I didn't say they'd make you their slaves, I said they'd make you theirs. You'll do anything for them, and you'll do it willingly. They can offer you power, money, physical perfection or even immortality. But it's all a lie. Once you get what you want, they take what they want in exchange. There're a lot of Nephandi who came from other Traditions, and they go back to the Traditions too, but as servants of their masters. Don't trust them, and don't hang around them."

"But..." Brent turned to Penny and then to Baron. "How can you tell a mage is a demon worshipper?"

Mr. Mistoffelees answered this question. "They feed you human hearts stewed in wine instead of cream and quail eggs." The cat stretched and sauntered back toward Penny. His tail swished against Brent's leg as he passed his seat. He jumped back into Penny's lap and curled himself into a warm, purring puddle when she started scratching him behind the ears. "Also, they don't like cats as much as they should."

Penny added, "Mistoffelees knows. He hung out with a Nephandi witch for years."

"There's no easy way to tell, Brent. For all you know, everyone in this room has fallen under their sway." Baron winked conspiratorially. "'Trust No One' is a good motto to follow. Make them earn the trust, whoever they are."

Marauders

"The crazy mages, the Marauders, aren't as evil as the Nephandi, but they're just as dangerous. They don't care about reality or the rules most mages follow. They'll do

anything any time. Some of them are easy to spot — they don't even try to imitate regular people anymore. Others, though, are as rational as you or me. At least on the surface. Keep your eyes out for mages that do crazy magick in front of the Sleepers and do it without any worry. They're the ones who might be Marauders or might be heading that way."

"So what makes a Marauder so different?" Once again, Brent felt left in the dark. "I mean, I once did a little spell to make it rain when the weather was bad. There's a lot of farmers where I live, and they needed the drought to end. When I was done, it rained for three full days, and I was sweating the whole time and not just a little sweat. I mean, I practically lived in the bath tub, 'cause whenever I moved around, the carpet got soaked under my feet, and whatever I was wearing was drenched in a matter of minutes. Don't the Marauders have to worry about that sort of thing?"

"No, the Mad Ones have found a way to avoid suffering from Paradox, which, by the way, is the 'proper' term for your three-day perspiration problem. I've heard they can do anything they want and not worry about the side-effects. My guess is, they've learned more about the true workings of the universe than they should, and what they learned gave them even more power than most mages, but it drove them crazy too.

"There are Orphans out there who could tell you more about the Marauders. Maybe Penny could take you to meet a few of them."

Others

"I've heard that vampires and werewolves are real." Brent felt like a fool for asking, but hoped that one of his advisors might know for certain. "Is it true? Are there really werewolves?"

"Oh, my, yes." Blackrose paused for a moment to light a clove cigarette, but when Pete scowled at her, she quickly extinguished it and continued. "I've seen werewolves in the Golden Gate Park, and I've seen them in the Haight, too. They're okay, as long as your karmic balance is on the positive side and you don't litter too much. Mostly they're like the Dreamspeakers, only with fur, fangs and a terminal bad attitude."

Baron lifted a drapery from one of the pews and tossed it in the air. As the cloth lifted, it hung in the darkness rather than falling. He gestured towards the free-floating cloth with a few whispered words, and Brent watched as the fabric warped and pulled until it appeared to drape over a bear-like thing some 10 feet tall. The cloth held for a few seconds, letting Brent get a good view of the shape it seemingly covered, and then dropped to the ground, lifting a cloud of dust into the darkness.

Blackrose nodded. "That's about the right shape and size. Some of them get even bigger. I wouldn't mind having one as a bodyguard, but I'd hate to have one mad at me."

Baron picked up the cloth and shook it out, then draped it back over the long wooden bench. "Vampires are real too, and they even drink blood. But not all of them kill their victims. Some of them just take a nip here and a nip there. I know a few Hollowers who run around with the vampires — they prefer being called Kindred as I understand it — but most of us tend to stay away from them. They can do something to you, mesmerize you if you stay around them too long." Baron smiled thinly, shaking his head. "I don't like the idea of anything that drinks blood making me its slave. I'd stay away from them if I were you."

"Okay, what about ghosts? Do the dead really walk?"

"You better damn believe it," Peter growled. He ran a hand through his wild hair and stared around the room. "There're two of them in the room with us now. Don't mess with the dead. They're nothing but grief."

Blackrose laughed and pointed to Peter. "Oh, sure! You should talk to Spooky Pete about the dead. They've given him no end of trouble." Peter glared at her, his eyes filled with betrayal and anger. Her laughter died on her lips. "Um, never mind."

Baron sat down again and took another pull at his Jaegermeister. "Pete's always angry and always depressed," he mused, "but other than that, he's a good guy." He winked in Peter's direction, but Peter did not respond. "I once asked him why he hung around if he hated living so much. He said, 'Because dying is lot's worse. I know, I've talked to the dead.' I believed him then, and I believe him now."

"Death is everywhere. You can't escape it. I just don't think there's any reason for anyone to go around looking for a way to make it come faster." Brent couldn't tell if Peter was speaking to him or just talking aloud, but the look that crossed the angry man's face was too filled with grief, and Brent felt for him.

"Are there any others I should know about?" The more Brent heard, the less he liked knowing.

"Not really. The way I understand it, most of the legends and myths you've heard about in the past were true once, but the Technocracy destroyed them when it took over the laws of reality."

"I know people who say they've met with faeries," added Penny. The animation of earlier had returned to her face. "And I know people who say they've met demons."

"The demons I can believe, but I doubt there are any faeries around anymore. If there were, I think the world would be a happier place than it is."

The Hollow Philosophy, Part Two: Lifestyles of the Hollowers

*oh please don't drop me home
because it's not my home, it's their
home, and I'm welcome no more*

— The Smiths, "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out"

"Okay," Neville walked towards the side door of the church. "That just about covers everything. This has been fun, but I've got to find a few items I dropped earlier and they just aren't here."

"Three Gashlycrumb Tinies cards?" Penny reached into her lunchpail-turned-purse and pulled three cards out. "I found them earlier and figured I'd drop by your place to hand them over. Glad you mentioned them."

Neville smiled again, and this time his face lit up with actual pleasure. Brent decided he had a nice smile when he used it. "Thank you, Penny. You're a lifesaver."

Penny waved away the thanks with an embarrassed smile. Brent interrupted the moment, feeling like a heel. "Listen, I hate to keep pestering you, but... What are the rules? Who leads the Hollow Ones? Are there any older Hollowers who run the show?"

Neville shook his head in disbelief and headed out into the rain. Everyone in the room called their good-byes and watched him leave.

"The King and Queen of the Hollow Ones are our only rulers," Penny intoned somberly and managed to hold a serious expression for about two seconds before starting to snicker. Blackrose made a point of not noticing the look Penny threw her.

Baron smiled and shook his head. "She's kidding. No, there are no leaders of the Hollow Ones. There are a king and queen, but they're just titles. They have no power over any of our kind. Once in a while, we'll pick a few people to go meet with other Hollowers in other cities, and that's about as far as it goes. Everything we do is done by consensus or just because we feel like it. The only rule even half the Hollowers agree on is old Aleister Crowley's 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.'" Baron walked over and crouched by Brent until they were at eye-level. This close, Brent could smell a faint aroma of patchouli around the man. "It's not our way to dictate what you can do any more than it is the way

of the Hollowers to tell you what you must learn. Individual choice is everything. Just use your common sense, and ask a few friends what they think before you go off trying something you're not too sure of. Use the brains you were born with."

"What about the other Hollowers? Penny said we've been around since the '20s. Where are they now?"

"Some of them are dead, some of them still show up around here from time to time."

"Do they act the same as us?"

"Brent, we don't act the same as each other, so why would they act the same as either of us? We're individuals. We join together because we like to. Some of the older Hollowers just sort of go their own ways, and some hang around and give advice from time to time. But they only give advice when we want them to or when they feel it's necessary. Very few of the older Hollowers try to decide how we run things." Baron paused a moment, studying his face, and asked, "Did you ever go to college?"

"Yeah, I'm in my second year now."

"Do you stay at a frat house?"

"Yeah."

"So think of us as a fraternity. We've got similar problems and similar interests. With the older members of the Hollow Ones, we've got certain points in common. We don't always see eye to eye, but we can relate to the same griefs with the Traditions and all of the other magickal practitioners. Our sense of fashion has changed since the older Hollowers hung around this old place, but we still have similar interests when it comes to magick."

Sascha spoke up then, destroying Brent's notion that she didn't know how to talk. In all fairness to the girl, it was obvious she was shy. "No, that's not right either. But it's close. If we're a college fraternity, then the older Hollowers are the drop-outs. They go their separate ways, and we never have to deal with most of them again. Most don't even speak with each other anymore."

Baron nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah. Sascha hit the target. She's always been better at this sort of stuff than I have."

Brent nodded slowly, digesting what he'd heard. "Okay, I think I understand. Thanks."

"No problem. Listen, I have to run, too. I just remembered a question I have for Neville. It was nice meeting you." Baron nodded to Penny and started walking away. Spooky Pete, Sascha and Blackrose made it to the door before he did, all heading their own separate ways. He paused halfway through the threshold of the door, letting the wind and the rain back into the old church. "See you at the House of Usher, Penny?"

"I'll be there. Maybe."

"Til then." The door closed, and Baron was gone.

"What's the 'House of Usher'?"

"A great story by E.A. Poe, and a Goth club we like to hang out at over on Howard Street. These days, it's almost a part of the Waydown." Penny indicated the entire church with a wave of her arms. "Like I said, the St. Francis is left for special occasions."

"So why were you here tonight?"

Penny smiled enigmatically, looking over to a spider's web that stretched across one of the boarded-over, stained-glass windows. "I was visiting an old friend."

The Hollow Philosophy, Part Three:

Finding Your Niche

*So we go inside and we gravely read the stones
all those people all those lives
where are they now?
with loves, and hates
and passions just like mine*
— The Smiths, "Cemetery Gates"

Hang-Outs and Hang-Ups

The Hollow Ones are found primarily around the Goth bars and counter-culture establishments of today's "troubled youths." They can be found in fetish bars, converted warehouses and even in clubs that change location from week to week, effectively seizing control of a bar or dance hall for a night and moving on to a new place the next night. For example: Where once the Waydown in San Francisco was held only at the abandoned remains of the St. Francis Church in the Ashbury Heights, it is now held in several locations throughout the city. The Hollow Ones of San Francisco have not abandoned their Chantry simply because of a police interruption; instead, they simply relocate regularly. Floating Chantries like the Waydown are very rare, but more are held by the Hollow Ones than by any of the Traditions or Conventions. The Nodes of the Waydown are still located in the same places they always were, the St. Francis and the Lincoln Cemetery, but the places from where the Hollow Ones tap their Nodes are now many and varied.

Most people tend to think of the Goths as a group of depressed, maudlin youths who have shunned society for a life of heavy drugs and somber music. There is a great deal more to the lifestyle than that and a great deal less. It depends entirely on who you speak to. The Hollow Ones themselves cannot easily define the Gothic scene, but they know they enjoy it. There is some small truth to the belief that the Neo-Goths bemoan the fate that left them so dark a world to inhabit, but at least an equal number of the Goths tend to look at the entire scene they are a part of with a tongue-in-cheek mentality. "Sure, the world is dark, but that doesn't mean we have to enjoy the darkness, nor does it mean we have to wallow in self-pity. We simply like to reflect what we see around us."

The Hollowers are not quite Goths, but they follow with the same trends these days, just as they followed with the new wave of occult interest in the 1920s. One primary difference is that, while the Neo-Goths might play with magic and the occult, the Hollowers actually perform magick. The distinction is far from subtle.

The numbers who follow the Hollow Tradition are growing steadily, and there are more mages from the other, more established groups taking note of them than ever before. Errants — mages who have lost their cabals in combat or who have simply fallen into disgrace — are often found joining with the Goth-mages. Where the members of the Council frown upon them, the Hollowers accept them as equals. The same can be said of Rogues and the Orphans in general. Where once banishment from the Nine meant disgrace and rejection, the Hollow Ones have come to accept these outcasts as equals and even, in rare cases, as people to be admired. There are even a few among the Hollowers who have dealt with demons, though no Nephandi that they know of. Some few Diabolists have turned away from their past ways seeking redemption, and the Hollowers have taken them in with the other drop-outs. This has fostered no love between the darkly-clad Neo-Goths and the Traditions.

Orphans

After three days and nights of trying to keep up with the Hollow Ones, Brent Veers finally ran across Penny Dreadful again, just as she was entering a store called 'Grimm's Occult Specialty Shoppe.' The store was large on the interior, well-lit and cluttered with every sort of occult paraphernalia Brent could imagine: skull-shaped candle-holders, an endless variety of Tarot cards, postcards, books, candles, incense, tapes for meditation, on and on as far as the walls and ceiling permitted. Penny stood at the counter, talking with a man in his 30s. The man had long brown hair,



a falcate nose and a large, drooping mustache. Brent figured the man was better suited for wearing a suit of armor in a fantasy painting than tending a shop. Just the same, Grimm seemed at home behind the counter, his eyes sliding from corner to corner of his little oasis and answering questions from the scattered patrons throughout the place.

By the time Brent had gathered his nerve and entered the shop, Penny was slipping a small brown bag into her lunchpail and heading for the door. She smiled pleasantly when she saw him and stopped. "How's tricks, Brent?"

"Not too bad. I've been trying to figure my way around town and looking for a place like this to see if there's anything worth noticing. How're you?"

"Busy. I wish I could stay to talk, but I've got a meeting with... a friend. But if you need anything — information or interesting merchandise — Grimm might be able to help. He's a good guy to know and not nearly as gruff as he acts." She waved quickly, sending a dozen little ringing noises through the room as her bangles clashed, and left the store.

Behind the counter, the man she'd called Grimm stood with his arms crossed, watching an adolescent girl off in a corner of the store. "Amy, I've told you before. If you want to read the books, you have to pay for them." Brent noticed Baron looking through the collections of Tarot cards, and waved. Baron smiled in return and nodded before going back to the cards.

"I was just reading the inside text. I need to know if it's worth the money." The girl's voice had a whiny, nasal quality that suggested to Brent she'd been caught in the act.

"The same inside text goes on for 50 pages? I don't think so. It's a good book, or it wouldn't be on the shelf. Buy it or not, but this isn't the library."

Exasperated noises from the corner, followed by a skinny girl dressed in jeans and a peasant blouse heading towards the counter with a paperback in one hand and with her other hand searching her jeans for money. "I've only got three dollars. The book's \$4.95 plus tax."

Grimm glowered down at the girl, his face managing to stay stern for all of three heartbeats before he threw his hands heavenward in disgust. "Fine! Pay me three now, and pay the rest later."

Amy grinned, flipping back her sun-bleached hair. "Thanks, Bryce!"

"Aw, get outta here, ya little delinquent." Brent stepped out of the girl's way as she went past, and Grimm thundered after her, "That's \$12.18 total you owe me now. I expect to be paid by the end of the month!"

The girl just waved in response and went on out the door. Grimm turned to stare at Brent and nodded. His eyes were cold, half-lidded, but his smile was warm. "Can I help you?"

Brent returned the stare and lowered his voice. "Yeah. Penny D. said I could maybe get some answers from you."

Grimm glanced around at the remaining customers and lowered his voice as well. "Yes, I might be able to give you answers. But first, I have to know the questions, and second, you need to wait until my customers have finished their shopping. Deal?"

"Deal. Thanks, Mr. Grimm."

"It's Bryce. And you must be Brent. Penny said you might be coming around."

Brent smiled, pleased that Penny had mentioned him. By the time he was ready to make a response, Grimm had already moved across the store to help one of the other customers.

Half an hour later, Grimm put out the 'Closed' sign and walked into the back half of his store. When he returned, he carried two mugs, an urn of steaming coffee and a bag of Keebler's Deluxe Grahams. As they ate, he talked.

"What are 'Orphans,' exactly?" Brent asked. "I've heard lots of stuff about them and all of it different. Some people say they're outcasts by choice, others say they're, like, spontaneously Awakened, and that nobody trusts someone they didn't raise. What are Orphans, anyway, and why don't the Traditions like them?"

"Orphans aren't really that different," Grimm replied. "We just aren't team players like the others. That makes them nervous, I guess, because they can't predict which way a wild card's going to fall."

"We do not follow anyone else's path to Ascension. Many of us choose to ignore the very concept and get by the best we can. It can be rough. I've seen many outsiders live their lives struggling to understand the meanings behind what the Sleepers refer to as 'reality,' knowing that there is more, but not understanding why so much goes unnoticed by the people around them. They're sort of like idiot-savants, but I think they choose to be that way. I can't imagine being Awakened enough to alter reality without knowing that there is more to life than what can be seen with the five senses. For a few of the mages I've met, the answers to all of their questions lies in seeking knowledge through books or even learning from others, but for a good number of Orphans, the only answers they receive come from within."

"I don't quite get what you're saying," Brent admitted sheepishly.

Grimm just smiled and tried to clarify. "The books available to most Sleepers don't even give hints about True Magick. Though they are often useful to practitioners of hedge magic, few are blatant in the information they offer. Besides, books only offer clues — you know that. Magick, real magick, can't be read about, just understood. Anybody who tries to learn it by looking in libraries is chasing his own tail."

With the Best of Intentions

Not all mages reach maturity before they Awaken. Some children come to their destiny early on. The lot of a precocious willworker, however, is problematic at best.

A child who understands the truth about reality cannot necessarily control the powers she commands. Such Orphans take extreme risks or make mistakes that no trained mage would fall prey to. Weird phenomena — anything from uncanny luck to rains of frogs or spontaneous parental combustion — occur as the child mage hones her talents. A child's temperament, too, plays a role in her learning process. Tantrums, manipulation, loneliness or abuse may give rise to spectacularly vulgar — or destructive — magicks.

The Technocracy is not blind to the risks and benefits of an Awakened child. Recruiters for "special schools" often visit parents whose children are known for odd outbursts and strange behavior. The New World Order and Progenitors in particular keep tabs on children who display symptoms of Awakening. Such children, if they are found, are converted, if possible, or destroyed. Tradition Mentors also seek out those with wild talents, and Nephandi squeeze in wherever they can to exploit a child's natural selfishness.

Avatars pose another problem for young mages. The pre-Awakening, Seekings and early lessons sometimes drive even adults into insanity. Children are often more resilient to such shocks, but the Avatar's prodding may leave psychological damage anyway. A truly violent Seeking can be as traumatic as rape, but with no physical side-effects. Some mages believe that Marauders are created by Avatars that are too powerful for their human counterparts, and many Traditions have an 'open door' policy regarding the untrained mages for this very reason.

Young mages, then, are often pursued by agents of any faction who happens to discover their existence. Without the legal status of older mysticks, child mages have few options if their parents or guardians agree to let "that nice man from the special school" take the child away for training, whatever training that may be. Many Orphans grow to hate other mages for just that reason, and they choose a solitary Path to escape further interference.

"Not to say that you can't learn anything from books." He waved his hand towards the shelves. "I wouldn't stock this stuff if it were meaningless. The clues are there if you know how to look, and from what Penny's told me, you do. Orphans just learn better from self-study than from teachers or choose to skip study hall completely."

"So where do they learn the stuff they need? You don't just wave your hands around till something happens."

"True," said Grimm, brushing crumbs from his mustache. "Many non-Traditional, so to speak, mages seek to barter for information, working as Sentinels in exchange for the use of a Chantry's library."

"What's a 'Sentinel'?"

"A sort of guard. Hired help, usually, paid in Tass or information. The time they get to spend in the library is limited, and they are constantly monitored throughout these study periods to ensure that the Chantry's prized possessions don't come to harm. At least they have a chance to learn on their own, at their own speed. I've done that before, and I know a few others who've done the same. I'm sure they'd agree with me when I say the system normally falls short of giving the Orphan the freedom she wants. The leaders of the Chantry tend to try converting the mage over to their ways of thinking. For some Orphans, the offer is acceptable, but for most, the set philosophies of the Traditions are too limiting. I and many others have always believed the best answers come directly from one's Avatar.

"I was four or five when I Awakened. But it was almost five more years before I met with my Avatar. Many of the imaginary friends that most adults take for nothing more than the by-product of a lonely child's mind are actually attempts by a young mage's Avatar to educate him in the ways of magick. I speak from experience when I say that's not the easiest route to take. While the end result can often be a powerful Adept in later years, the earlier times for such mages are filled with potential dangers. Avatars are as individual as people, and some Avatars can tend to push too hard for their counterpart's own good."

Seeking the Truth: Rogues and Errants

*If you should die before me
Ask if you can bring a friend
Pick a flower
Hold your breath
And drift away...*
— Stone Temple Pilots, "Still Remains"



Brent relaxed around the older man, realizing that Grimm was more than willing to talk about mages and their society all day long. "When I was talking to Penny and her friends, they said a lot of the Tradition mages are joining with them. Is that true? What about Errants? I've heard that word before. What does it mean? And Rogues? Are they the same thing?"

Grimm nodded before he answered. "Not all Orphans are self-Awakened. There are many who simply cannot find their place in the more acceptable factions of mage society. Rogues, for example, are mages who have been with one of the Traditions or Conventions and in some cases were fully accepted members. Through circumstances that can often be deadly later, they have been forced to leave the Tradition or have simply quit the Convention. Not a wise thing to do, but it happens. Neither of the major established powers easily forgives a mage who has abandoned them, and in some extreme cases, a bounty might be placed on the Rogue. I'm sort of an exception to that rule. I'm a Rogue, technically speaking, but I'm still on good terms with most of my old teachers. I'm a self-Awakened mage, and I started at a very young age. These days, I'm a Rogue, and I deal with the other Orphans all the time, but I've also been a member of several Traditions. I just found the Traditions too limiting. I like what a lot of them have to say, but I don't like all of what they have to say, if you can see the difference."

"Yeah. I think I can."

"Every Tradition worries about Rogues, because the expatriate mages sometimes take some heavy-duty secrets with them. The only faction of mage society that never needs to worry about Rogues leaving their ranks is the Nephandi. Once you are Reborn, you're in for life. No one who enters among the Nephandi has ever successfully escaped, though a few might have tried. Even Marauders can break away from their peers, though only if they managed to break away from their own insanity."

"Errants are another story entirely. Those guys are the true pariahs of the Awakened. Damn few among the Traditions like to associate with a mage whose Chantry was destroyed or whose cabal disappeared under questionable circumstances. Most Errants are driven, bitter individuals who seek the truth to what happened when their cabal was slaughtered and they were away, or who still question how they managed to survive an attack that killed their friends. Of course, there are a few bad seeds out there who actually have betrayed their own, seeking admission into the Technocracy or simply because they wished to escape from their Convention. Errants are generally mistrusted for a reason, though many suffer the stigma of a few guilty parties."

Brent looked at Grimm for a few moments, weighing the silence between them. "Listen, thanks for your help, Bryce. I've gotta be heading out. I'm supposed to meet with a few people later on, and I need to go get ready." Brent smiled and preened his hair in self-mockery. "I want to look 'just so.'"

"It was a pleasure, Brent. Come back anytime."

Brent walked as calmly as he could away from the store, pondering Grimm's comments on Errants. After a few paces, he shrugged away his worries and smiled. His mission had been successful, and all he had to do now was call the home-base and report his findings. He felt a brief flash of guilt for the coming betrayals. The Hollowers had been friendly and helpful, and if he really was with their non-Tradition, he would have stayed here indefinitely. Best just to get everything handled as quickly as he could and get on with his new life in the New World Order. Guilt was for the weak, and he shunted the emotion aside before he could take time to think about what he was doing.

"New York."

The two words were more spat than spoken, filled with bitter hatred.

"What?" Brent turned and saw Baron standing before him. Baron's earlier smile was gone.

"I said, New York. As in you've been there. As in you turned in a Hollow One Chantry there. Betrayed them to the MIBs."

"What the hell are you talking about, Baron? I've been there, but you sort of have to go there to get down from Maine. I've never met any Hollowers in New York." He felt a greasy sheen of fear-sweat cover his brow and started reaching for his silencer-equipped pistol.

Baron seared him into a pile of ash before his hand ever even reached the pistol butt. "I'm glad me and Sascha came here. You should've made sure everyone was at the club before you left and called in that raid. Never leave witnesses behind, especially if you don't know what they look like." The tattoo of a burning man smoldered on the top of his left hand.

Neville stepped from the shadows, his face as stoic as a funeral mask. "You're sure he came alone?"

"Yeah. Either me or Sascha's been watching him non-stop since he left the St. Francis."

"Will you be staying around, or will you go back home?"

"Staying around. There's nothing left for us up there. Besides, Sascha likes it here."

"Congratulations on finding him."

"I wouldn't have found him if it wasn't for you. Thanks, Neville."

Neville shrugged. "You buy the first round, and we'll call it even."

"Deal."

Neville looked down at the ashes and reached into a bag he'd been carrying. Working quickly, he used the whisk-broom and dust pan from the bag to fill the glass jar with the smoking ashes. When the jar was filled and the ashes for the most part swept up, he nodded to Baron. "Let's get to Blackrose's place. She said she can handle this matter with little effort."

"Whatever, just as long as we get this done quickly." He showed Neville the illustrated bird cage on his ribs. Within the gold-toned bars, a screaming man (who looked suspiciously like the one whose ashes Neville carried) slowly thrashed back and forth. "Brent here's getting impatient."

Within an hour, they were at Blackrose's and helping her set up her materials for the spell she was about to attempt. "Are you sure about this, Blackrose?" Baron didn't like the way this was moving, but saw no other options. Still, the choice was hers.

"Oh, sure." She waved a black-nailed hand in a gesture of dismissal. "It's not like I haven't done this before." She held up her copy of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Strange Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. "Old Howard Phillips knew his stuff, whether he realized it or not. I've got the ingredients, and it's really the best way to handle this." She sounded confident, but the look on her face said she was bluffing her way through this entire mess. Neville and Baron stood aside and let her do her work, with Baron only stepping forward when she demanded the soul of Brent Veers.

The bars on the tattooed cage opened easily, and the soul tried to escape, but Blackrose was too quick, snagging it with a Soul-Catcher and forcing it into the reconstituted body on the dusty floor of her kitchen. Baron bit his tongue to stop from going into a hysterical fit of giggles. Spooky Pete's words from the other night rang in his head: "Don't mess with the dead. They're nothing but grief." Still, better to get him on his way.

Brent Veers stood up of his own volition, sucking in air for the first time in his second life. There was a certain light in his eyes that scared Baron deeply, but he did his best to ignore the fear and stepped forward to face the man he'd murdered a few hours earlier.

The sheer terror in the man's eyes, the certainty of what lay beyond death's door, was almost overwhelming. "Oh, God. Oh, dear God."

"There's no time for that. You have to leave here, go back to where you're supposed to report to your new bosses. Do you understand what you have to do?"

Brent nodded, his head somehow looser than it should be on his shoulders. "Yes. I'll tell them the right lies, the ones Blackrose demands."

"Good. Now leave."

"Yes. I'll leave now." His voice was hollow, empty of all emotion save a dark and bitter despair. Despite himself, Baron smiled. Finally, Brent understood the feelings that drove most of the Hollow Ones.

Rotes

Soul Shaping

•••• Spirit, •••• Mind, ••• Prime

Several of the more powerful Hollow Ones have found a way to fight fire with fire, by stealing the life-force of a person and reprogramming their target to do their bidding. The mage must first force the soul of a target from the body (a delicate task if one wishes to avoid killing him) and then alter the way in which the freed soul "thinks." The more successes rolled, the better the reprogramming works. For example: One success might allow a mage to change the target's feelings about a specific individual, while five successes would allow for a radical alteration of the person's entire personality. A Technomancer could be made to believe that technology is a blight that must be destroyed. The Hollow One could change a person's nature or — with five successes — her essence.

Brittle Bones

•••• Entropy, •••• Life

The mage using this rote temporarily alters a target's bone structure, making the bones extremely fragile. For each success on the casting, reduce the victim's soak dice by one. Thus, a light blow to the jaw can shatter bone. Seconds later, the bone returns to its normal strength, but the damage inflicted remains.

Accidental Overdose

•••• Life, •••• Matter

Many Hollow Ones dabble in substance abuse and are often adept at creating the drugs they use or sell. This particular rote was created by a Hollower named Hopping Johnny as retaliation against a pusher who tried to steal his stash. The mage using this rote changes the excess inorganic matter carried within a target's bloodstream into a toxic chemical substance or a powerful stimulant or depressant. The victim's own body will react to the substance just as if the person had ingested the drug. This usually leads to an effect that perfectly mimics a massive overdose. Hopping Johnny retrieved his valuables with no ill side-effects, but his victim's cause of death was listed as an "accidental overdose of meth-amphetamine."

Allergic Reaction

•••• Life, •• Prime

The mage using this rote creates an allergic reaction in the body of an opponent. The reaction can range from an irritating rash to swelling of the mucous membranes to death, depending

on damage inflicted. The mage can custom-design the allergy to be something that is present at the time or something that the target might run across later, such as a bee or a particular type of food.

Talisman Tattoos

••• Matter, ••• Life, ••• Prime

The mage using this rote can transmute a non-living, non-magickal item into a tattoo. Using the Sphere of Life, the mage can then create a bond between the illustration and her own flesh, allowing her to carry a small assortment of weapons or tools without encumbrance. The tattoos must be visible in order to be released from the skin without causing possible damage to whatever the mage is wearing. Once created, these objects may be used repeatedly, but will always cost one Quintessence to release from the body and one to replace them on the body. The rote must be cast every time the object is released (a vulgar effect). A botch means the skin rips off with the object, inflicting one to three Health Levels (depending on the object's size) to the caster (non-soakable). If broken, the objects cannot be replaced.

Welcoming the Jester

••• Mind (or •• Entropy, •• Mind)

The mage using this rote forces another person to act in a preposterous manner. A target successfully struck by this Effect forgets all rational thought temporarily and will react on a primal level, calling out insults to anyone who has offended him or attempting to passionately embrace anyone he finds attractive. The mage adept at this rote can overwhelm her victims with a single emotion or command them to act upon hidden desires they would never consider performing in public for fear of ridicule. This rote can have negative side-effects, however. When this rote is used on someone who intensely dislikes any individual around them, things could go bad quickly. More than once, Welcoming the Jester has resulted in brutal attacks and even murder.

Danse Macabre

••• Spirit, ••• Correspondence, ••• Matter

By using an item that once belonged to a person who passed on into the Shadowlands (a locket or some small personal item), the Hollower is able to call forth the spirit of that dead person and link him to that personal item from the past. This effectively creates a temporary, one point Fetter for the wraith, allowing him greater freedom to visit the material world. If the Fetter is charged with Quintessence (Prime 3), it becomes a permanent, one point Fetter.

Apathy

••• Entropy, •• Mind

By using this rote, the Hollower brings about a forced state of physical and mental depression in their target. The target suddenly finds that he has no energy and no will to bother with anything more complicated than walking. Neville Sinclair created this rote to counter the increased violence against the Hollow Ones that threatened the fledgling Clique in the late '20s. These days, it is often used as a form of riot control by Hollowers who are facing uneven odds.

Purging the System

••• Life, ••• Matter

A mage using this rote can cure substance abuse addiction in another person or herself. For instance, by altering the nature of the addictive substance in the person's body and removing all physical need for it, the mage can cure a person of alcohol, nicotine, heroin or crack addiction. However, the emotional attachment and psychological desire for the drug still exist, and there is no guarantee that the addict will not start again down the road to ruin.

Smoke Screen

••• Mind, •• Matter

By using a cigarette or even an atomizer as her focus, a Hollow One can alter the compounds released into the air to create a powerful hallucinogen. Hallucinations last for one hour per success on the casting roll; targets can resist these effects with a Willpower roll. The more successes a mage rolls, the wilder the hallucinations are. This rote is most often used as a way of escaping from dangerous situations or to ensure that witnesses to any crime committed by the mage cannot remember the details. Some Hollowers, however, use it to liven up parties.

Burn-Out

•• Forces, • Prime

Out of necessity, many Hollow Ones quickly learn to use whatever is available as a defensive or offensive weapon. By focusing an electrical charge through a light bulb, the mage causes a minor overload charged with Quintessence. The light bulb builds a massive charge through its simple filament that creates a blinding flash, effectively releasing all of the light it would ever give in one instant instead of over the course of hundreds of hours. The brilliance exceeds the sun's rays at noon and can cause minor burns (one Health Level) to anyone standing within ten feet.



Hollow Ones

Neville Sinclair

No one knows for sure just how old Neville Sinclair truly is. Many of the oldest living mages recall meeting him in times past which range from the 1500s through to the present day, although all confess that he has changed considerably. Neville's off-hand comment to Astria Moonshade of the Verbena is legendary among the Hollow Ones and is also quite literally the reason for the Clique's name. Neville Sinclair is well-known for his actions on behalf of all the Hollowers, working as a sort of legal advisor in situations where Tradition mages have demanded honor duels. He is also renowned for his magickal abilities, and some believe he may be an Oracle in disguise.

Rumors persist that Neville leaps from body to body, choosing those prepared to die at their own hands and replacing their souls with his own at the moment before they actually perform the act. Others claim that he's hidden his soul in another place to protect himself from the Nephandi. None but Neville can say if either of these stories are true.

If there is any single mage responsible for the successes of the Hollow Ones, that mage is Neville Sinclair. At present, Neville resides in San Francisco, California, where he spends a great deal of his time searching for several rare books he's traced from other parts of the country and even from Europe.

Bryce Grimm

Grimm has connections with all of the Traditions and has developed a reputation for acquiring unique items for those who know where to find him. Bryce Grimm spends most of his time running his occult specialty shop, dealing in New Age books and Tarot decks, all the while handling the sales of Talismans and items of power in his back room. Bryce seldom stays in any area for long, more often moving to another city after only a few months. Some say he has several permanent shops established, so well-defended magickally that the only way to encounter them is find them by accident.

He is a Rogue, one who has willingly quit not one but several Traditions after trying to follow their ways. While he has trained with many, none of them has yet proved satisfactory to his needs. He is constantly looking for something he cannot seem to find and others who agree with his own unique philosophies of life and Ascension. Even the Traditions who have trained him have accepted that Grimm is not a man capable of finding peace, but no one is certain what drives him away from teacher after teacher, constantly frustrated by his inability to find whatever indefinable goal he is searching for.

He is helpful to all mages, save those of the Technocracy. He claims to have had several run-ins with the Conventions, but he always escaped with his life and always brought with him a stronger hatred for the Technomancers. His lifestyle has left him bitter, and while many believe that Grimm is not his true name, all agree that it suits him.

He was recently in San Francisco, but he has apparently moved on. His shop is still there, run by someone else, and the back room where he kept all of his specialty items is now empty. The woman who runs the shop, April, has denied any knowledge of where he might be. She receives her paychecks through the mail. The postal marks on the envelopes have come from London, Berlin, Paris, New York and Tokyo. She has hinted to a few that Grimm is once more on the run, but to others she has simply said that he is preparing for another of his rare but well-attended auctions.





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Book Four: Storytelling

The preceding chapters have all dealt with outcasts from a player's perspective. Now it's time to deal with the Storyteller's needs. There are several considerations to be aware of before starting an outcasts chronicle. Near the top of the list is the flavor of your chronicle and how you want to handle the established conflicts within the World of Darkness games.

Theme

The theme of *Outcasts: A Players Guide to Pariahs* is individuality. Characters in the clans, tribes and Traditions all have to deal with being part of a greater whole. Here, the loners get their chance to fly — or fall. Let the proverbial black sheep run wild for a change. Let the players break from the traditional molds and explore aspects of their characters they have never attempted before.

Mood

The World of Darkness is dangerous enough, but for the outsider, everything holds new threats. The mood of *Outcasts* is one of rebellion mixed with paranoia. It's easier to join with a group and toe the party line than it is to stand alone, especially when there are already so many threats against you. Fear should be the outcast's constant companion, and that anxiety should overshadow almost everything else. However, just as the apprehension should be heavy, so too should be the belief that the organized factions in the World of Darkness are *wrong* (at least in the eyes of the outcast). There should always be a justified reason for not wanting to belong. Something integral to each of the characters should set them apart from the rest of their kind.



Loneliness, too, should have a place in any outcast chronicle. None of the outcasts are easily accepted. For them, the opportunities to advance are almost non-existent, and friends are hard to find — especially friends who can truly understand why they constantly buck the system.

Storytelling Caitiff

Of all the outcasts, the Caitiff get shafted the worst. The Ronin have the hope of being accepted back into the tribe. The Hollow Ones and Orphans still have a chance to join the Traditions or even the Conventions if they choose to do so. No option exists for the Caitiff; they're stuck with being second-class citizens for eternity. Unless they break the rules in a big way.

Most Caitiff should have no idea who their sire was. This lack of knowledge in itself can lead to interesting and often Machiavellian chronicles, to say nothing of individual game sessions. Learning who Embraced a character should be extremely difficult, not only because the sire doesn't wish to be found, but because other Kindred will lie and claim they know who is responsible. Some might lie in order to gain favors from the Caitiff, while others might just point the finger at an old enemy in order to make that person's life more difficult. Whether they like it or not, Caitiff are as much a part of the Jyhad as any other vampire.

To make matters worse, they are also the most expendable pawns around. Everyone will try to use them, especially before attempting to manipulate a member of their own, and obviously superior, clan. Why waste a perfectly good lieutenant when a private will do the job just as easily? The Methuselahs are ruthless in their manipulations.

A Caitiff with some serious street-smarts can make life more comfortable by playing along in the Jyhad. Boons demanded by a Caitiff still have to be honored, especially if there is a chance that the clanless little whelp might turn coat and join with the enemy. Despite their power, the elders of any city still need to follow the rules or risk weakening their own position within their clan and the fiefdom they watch over.

Explore the political implications just as thoroughly for the Caitiff as for the clans. Perhaps even more so, as the Caitiff have nowhere to go but up. When you're at the bottom of the trash heap, you must do your best to climb, especially since garbage rolls downhill.

Allow the characters the chance to advance, and permit them to take heavier risks, because they have less to lose and more to win. However, the battle for any sort of



recognition is much harder for the clanless. They exist because somebody somewhere got careless. Just as unwanted children often must fight harder to gain acceptance, so must Caitiff struggle for recognition. Usually the only person who pays for the sire's sin is the Caitiff.

Caitiff players should be allowed to learn new Disciplines, but the cost should be substantially higher because they are trying to learn without a teacher; this is reflected in the rules for *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Just as Ronin have difficulty learning new Gifts without aid, Caitiff must work harder to discover new ways to use their powers.

Be especially careful when allowing new Disciplines into the game. The natural tendency of most players is to come up with a new power that is not only unique but extremely powerful. This trend will likely be even worse in the case of Caitiff players. Above all else, try to make certain the Discipline does not shift the balance of power. As a recommended method of weighing the effects of a new Discipline, compare what the power is capable of to what any of the Thaumaturgic Paths are able to do at the same level.

Storytelling Ronin

The Ronin are rare. The only reason they exist is because they have defied the laws of their people enough to be exiled but not killed. This is the last chance Ronin characters will receive. By the same token, you should allow players to develop their characters just as thoroughly and carefully as they do when they run with the pack. It is only proper for the Storyteller to remind the over-enthusiastic player that he is in danger not only from the Wyrm, but from his or her pack, sept or tribe. The Ronin are being watched, and if they fall to the Wyrm's foul manipulations, they will be hunted down and killed without mercy. The same is true of the Skin-Dancers, but the threat is even worse: Members of this tribe will be killed if they are discovered, regardless of whether or not they are Wyrm-corrupt.

Try to emphasize the solitude of the Ronin. The Garou are pack creatures, and loneliness is far more intense for them than for any other faction of the Gothic-Punk milieu. The physical need for companionship is stronger,



as is the very real need to remain connected to Gaia and Her sister, Luna. Play up the frustration of not running wild and often being stuck within the confines of the city (if that is where your chronicle is set), especially when the character's auspice matches the proper moon phase. The primal side of the Garou longs to break free and cut loose on something—or someone—that richly deserves to die. Emphasize how the howls of Garou, wolves and even dogs inspire an aching need to join with the Wyld and its minions.

Learning Gifts

Life should be difficult for Ronin when it comes to learning new Gifts. The characters will have to work hard to convince any spirit to part with its knowledge. Remember that the spirits have made deals not with individuals, but with tribes. The history that exists between Garou and their spirit-friends is long and often tumultuous, but there is a history nonetheless. Ronin should have to woo and cajole individual spirits into giving them any aid at all.

Keep track of the character's Gnosis and Rage ratings as well. Away from the rituals and traditions of the tribe, a Ronin should have to work at keeping her connection to Gaia, Luna and even her Rage. If these ratings drop below one at any point, the connection is gone. Managing to re-establish that connection should be a grueling feat, and could well lead to several nights' worth of intense gaming.

Storytelling Hollow Ones and other Orphans

Potluck Magick

The Orphans do not have established Spheres. They have no teachers to steer them away from "forbidden" areas of study, and each sets his or her own curriculum. Each learns as an individual, though many are influenced by previous incarnations of their Avatars. These mages are often very eclectic in their learning patterns as a result of their lack of formal training.

It's not unusual for an Orphan to gather numerous foci in association with one Sphere and to use absolutely none with another. Additionally, it's not unheard of for an Orphan to use technomagick and more traditional magick hand in hand. Herbs and various plants might be used while performing Life magick, while a laptop computer is used to handle Correspondence magick. Many among the Tradi-

tions are unsettled by this behavior and see the Orphans' use of technomagick as a possible threat. Orphans who use magicks normally employed by the Technocracy are also at risk of gaining the attention of the Conventions — attention best avoided. For that reason alone, some Tradition mages will go out of their way to teach new rotes to any Orphan they see employing technomagick. The New World Order and the Syndicate are also employing the same methods, and a good number of Orphans have been recruited into the Technocracy after being recognized as wild cards. Contrary to what many of the Traditions believe, the Technocracy does not see every mage as a potential threat; they, too, see the benefits of new allies.

Seekings

*Down where this ugly man
seeks his sustenance*

*Down in the blue, midnight flare
a glass hand cuts through the water
scything into his twisted roots*

— Siouxsie and the Banshees, "The Killing Jar"

The Seekings of child mages and untrained Orphans are special cases for Storytellers. Keep in mind that the characters have not had formal training with any Tradition, and instead focus on the sources of learning available to the mage. For example, if a child mage's Avatar normally takes the form of an imaginary friend, then the Avatar should keep the same characteristics and personality, only growing more mature when the child grows more mature. If, on the other hand, the Avatar seeks to aid the Orphan with vivid dreams and nightmares, fill the nocturnal visitations with symbolic images of whatever Spheres the mage is learning.

Seekings should be interesting for all mages, but offer an extra element of risk for Orphans. The Avatars of the spontaneously Awakened are strong and often brutal in their attempts to enlighten. Mages who are unprepared for what their Avatars are trying to teach them are more likely to suffer from one form of dementia or another, and are more likely to fall prey to hubris than other mages. There is no one to caution them about the seemingly god-like powers they wield, and most have only their personal experiences with Paradox to use as guidelines. Avatars who push too hard risk forcing their mages into a state of Quiet or even insanity. Child mages do not consciously seek this state, but there are a few cases where they have entered this unsettling mental phase by accident, a situation that resulted in hideous tantrums and substantial property damage. As the child mages and many Orphans work magick on an instinctive level, their temper flares can cause damage before they have even had a chance to consider their actions, a dangerous risk for anyone around them.





For the luckiest Orphans, the Avatar can explain the truths of magick with little or no trauma. This is especially true of child mages. The unbiased mind of a young child often accepts all that is possible without having to balance what they know is true against what Sleeper society has told them is true. Whereas the more mature mage might have trouble accepting the possibility of wingless flight, the child mage can more easily accept the reality of flying through the air in defiance of the paradigm. Knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but doubt is far deadlier. Most among the Orphans have no idea that their Avatars even exist.

The Edge of Shadow: Combining Elements of the World of Darkness

Vampires, werewolves and mages all have their own exclusive beliefs, but there are few reasons why outcasts should be so exclusive. The largest threat to any outcast group comes from the established powers, not other loners. Ronin Garou do not have to answer to anyone, at least not in their own eyes. Hollow One mages are as likely to ignore the Traditions' biases as the Traditions are to ignore the Hollow Ones' very existence. So why should any Hollower refuse the opportunity to have a werewolf for a friend? When it comes to bodyguards, few are better suited. For that matter, Caitiff shouldn't hesitate to befriend either of the aforementioned groups. The Kindred's natural paranoia about all other supernaturals makes life easier for a Caitiff with powerful friends.

But running an outcast chronicle need not be limited only to the three groups mentioned above. There is no reason why a Ronin can't hang around with a Son of Ether mage, if the Ethermage in question doesn't mind. The same goes for the Kindred. Nosferatu are notorious for loving information above all else, and they would certainly try to ingratiate a Hollow One if they saw a profit in it.

A friendship or even a love affair between supernatural "races" can easily add a great deal of spice to any chronicle. Use the established biases to add to a story, not to detract from the potential impact and strife that such relationships should cause.

Adding Texture to the Overall Picture

There is no reason why a Ronin can't still fight against the Wyrm, and no reason why Kindred and mage can't join in on the fun. Pentex expects trouble from the werewolves, but they've had few serious clashes with the Awakened or the vampires. Use the established enemies from Vampire, Werewolf and Mage to your advantage as a Storyteller. Don't be afraid to mix the heroes of your story, and don't hesitate to use the villains either. No one likes the Nephandi. They're nasty, and they don't play nice. But the same can be said about the Technocracy. Why wouldn't they want to see werewolves and vampires, as well as the Traditions, eradicated?

A universal villain can make for an interesting chronicle. Adding additional aspects from the various games can only make stories more colorful. The Sabbat feel no special love for mages or werewolves. There is no reason for any of the outcasts to feel any special love for them, either. The same stands true for any of the factions in the World of Darkness. The Garou hate the Kindred with an almost universal passion. They would not approve of any werewolf, even a Ronin, associating with one or more of the Leeches. The challenge in running a multi-genre chronicle is not running out of enemies, but choosing which ones best suit your needs. Below are suggestions for incorporating the villains of the World of Darkness into a single outcasts chronicle. These are only a few suggestions and may be used or not as the Storyteller sees fit.

The Arcanum

The Arcanum studies all of the supernaturals, but they have seldom had a chance to see how these groups interact. While they prefer to use mortal operatives, there are exceptions to every rule. What better group to infiltrate the supernaturals than a collection of supernatural renegades embittered by their mistreatment? Perhaps there is a darker, more sinister method to the scholars' madness, one that is only apparent after a number of stories. There may be another group, working under the guise of scholars, that wants to see the supernatural population of the world united... or destroyed.

Theme: How far can mortals be trusted? The theme of an Arcanum chronicle is much like a story based around the Kindred in general. Who can the players trust among these mortals who seem to know so much and yet are so naive? How far will they go in search of knowledge? The Arcanum has a vast collection of information, but how much is accurate and how much is completely wrong?

Ronin Garou dealing with these mortals could run across passages written centuries before that have relevance to their own past lives. Would that knowledge be of benefit — or would it lead them to the wrong conclusions about the humans and the war waged by the Garou?

Here is a veritable treasure trove of knowledge for a Darkling mage, alphabetized and chronicled, waiting to be read. What price would the Hollow One feel the prize is worth? Would she betray others to the Arcanum to learn the secrets of the ages? What truths lie buried in the halls of the Arcanum, and what secrets await rediscovery?

Mood: A chronicle based around the troupe fighting alongside the Arcanum would reflect the hatred and fear felt by outcasts in an entirely new light. The members of the Arcanum are only humans, but they are humans with knowledge, and knowledge is power. How far can the troupe trust the scholars? How much freedom would the group be given? And then there is the question of hidden motives. What does the Arcanum truly seek by employing these renegades?

Story Ideas:

The Arcanum has decided to allow supernaturals into their prestigious group for two reasons: one, they are a source of information on their respective societies; two, the characters are excellent subjects for study. An introductory story should revolve around the characters deciding whether or not the Arcanum can be trusted and if so, to what degree.

Building from a simple meeting, the characters would then be allowed to see more and more of what the Arcanum has learned over the centuries, and in turn could well begin to see the greatest risks faced by all of their peers. The characters might even decide to warn their respective factions about these machinations at work in the World of Darkness, but the Arcanum would kill to keep some secrets. The Arcanum knows more than most want to realize, and they certainly know enough to see the characters hunted down.

The Black Hand

The Black Hand is an organization run primarily by the Kindred, but they have allies among the mages and even the wraiths. As enemies go, there are few who can so easily manipulate or destroy a troupe for their own ends. Contrary to the beliefs of the Sabbat, the Black Hand is involved heavily in the machinations of mortals and Kindred alike. They do their best to ensure that their unspoken rules are enforced. To that end, there is no reason why they wouldn't love to manipulate or even openly hire a select group of outcasts to do their bidding. The Hand is a secretive organization, and exploiting the renegades of the various factions might well be the best way to handle their latest crisis.



The Hand could well elect the troupe to take on Pentex or to bring about a violent conflict in Los Angeles between the mages and vampires of the Anarch Free States. Nothing is too cruel if it suits their purposes, and no cost is too high.

Theme: Hope springs eternal. The Black Hand promises much to its members and seeks, in its own way, to bring an end to the foul manipulations of their counterparts. Still, members of the Hand are a savage and ruthless lot. Would the troupe risk dealing with every faction of the World of Darkness? The potential rewards could include a restoration of prestige within the ranks of the Garou or the power to fell even the greatest of enemies among the Kindred. Again, for the Hollowers, there is the promise of knowledge and the dream of Ascension, that bitter, elusive hope that even the Darklings fall prey to. But at what price? What would the troupe have to sacrifice in return, and what dangers would be theirs if they dared join with the True Black Hand?

Mood: The mood of a Black Hand chronicle would reflect the danger of discovery. To virtually every facet of the World of Darkness, the Black Hand is a mysterious force best left alone, a group to be feared and spoken of only in whispers. Even the Sabbat dread catching the eye of a Black Hand soldier. How true are the characters' beliefs in the

twisted words and doctrines of the Hand? How far will they go to achieve the goals of their new masters? Will they work as double-agents inside the Hand, hoping to betray their overlords in the belief that they can gain prestige or redemption?

Story Ideas:

The troupe would first be observed over a span of time before they were invited to join with the Black Hand. Over a series of stories, they would see the same shadowy figure watching from the distance, always disappearing if they try to confront him.

Dealings with the different factions of Kindred society and several mages could add to the level of paranoia. No one is to be trusted, yet the Black Hand is asking for aid and promising a hefty return on the investment.

Once accepted into the Hand, if they should decide to go that route, the troupe would be thrust into a seemingly endless array of dangers, working towards the goals of the Hand. But along the way, they might learn that all is not perfect among this most secretive of orders. The ideals of the order are strong, but the dreams have been corrupted as time has passed. The risks of revealing the threat from within to the more powerful members of the Hand may be a decision with fatal consequences.

The Camarilla

The Camarilla believes in secrecy to achieve their means. What better source for their purposes than a group of rejects who are effectively ignored by all around them? Perhaps there's a prince who has broken the rules but who is tricky enough not to get caught. Why would anyone believe a pack of werewolves was working for the Kindred? Or a cabal of Orphans, for that matter? Better still, a collective of mages, werewolves and vampires, almost unstoppable when united toward a single goal.

Theme: As the old adage goes: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Who among the outcasts would be strong enough to avoid the seductive promise of redemption and revenge? The ancient Kindred are vile, manipulative monsters, capable of anything in their efforts to win in their ancient Jihad. With so little left to keep them occupied, they have made pawns of the world. Could the troupe long withstand the corruption and decadence that is offered by the Camarilla? Or would they fall swiftly into the ancient battles waged by creatures older than civilization?

Mood: The Camarilla believes in maintaining its veil of secrecy above all else. Fear and mystery would hold sway in every tale involving them. The Camarilla's resources are vast, and they enjoy strong connections to virtually every aspect of the World of Darkness. With such powers at their disposal, the Camarilla could deliver the dreams of every member of the troupe. But divining the truth behind the Machiavellian plots of the Methuselahs could lead to a slow and painful death. Why did the leaders of the Camarilla choose the troupe as their pawns, and what are the gains, aside from simple material wealth? What sacrifices would be demanded, and who would defy the ancient masters of the world?

Story Ideas:

The troupe is taught to fight against the Sabbat and the various factions in the World of Darkness, battling against foes far older and more cunning than they. Learning the dark secrets of the Jihad leads to certain risks. The Methuselah are adept at manipulating their pawns, and even the wisest would likely learn too late that the Camarilla has decided they are not ideal as playthings. For every secret learned, for every task performed, the troupe gains in prestige. Simultaneously, they gain enemies. Climbing higher in the echelons of the Camarilla is only safe for a short time, unless you have the power to back your position. Before long, the characters find themselves wanted for crimes against the very people they served — or worse, find themselves the targets of plans meant to fell the forces they work to protect.

The Technocracy

Either as friend or foe, the Technocracy can make life interesting for the outcast Troupe. Who better to put the whammy on the groups marked for termination than the very people who have been rejected by them? Who knows the ways of the enemy better than an insider? If a few must be allowed to live in order to stop the rest from winning in the Ascension War, that is perfectly acceptable.

Theme: What price individuality? Whether as a friend or as an enemy, the Technocracy demands subservience. There is no forgiveness for failure, nor is there acceptance of the flawed worker. Here all must be done in the proper way, or punishment will follow. Can the troupe stand the strict rules of the Technocracy for long, or will they fight back, demanding their freedom?

Mood: Righteous anger is the main focus of a chronicle centering around the Technocracy. As friends to the outcasts, they allow the troupe to hunt and destroy all who have scorned them. Here at last is a force with enough connections and power to aid in the complete decimation of the hateful ones who refused to accept the outcasts for what they are. But as enemies, they are the perfect personification of all that is wrong with the societies that spurned the pariahs. Cold, ruthless machines that demand absolute adherence to the law, they would crush the individual spirit in order to achieve their goals. What better chance to rage against the machine?

Story Ideas:

The Troupe find themselves targeted by the Technocracy. Piece by piece, their lives fall into ruin as the Technomancers destroy seemingly insignificant aspects of their world. A Kindred might suddenly be audited, her accounts closed until the audit is complete. A Glass Walker is arrested for insider trading, his reputation in the corporate world destroyed by the false charges and his position in the sept taken away as he is ostracized. A Hollower's cabal is hunted down and destroyed, with evidence left behind that the Nephandi are responsible, leaving the survivor more ostracized than ever, accused of going Rogue to make a profit.

Just when matters seem their worst, the Technocracy might step forward to offer them aid, or they might find the single clue necessary to set them on the right path. The troupe could end up serving the Technocracy or doing their best to prove their innocence in a world where they are no longer accepted.

To make matters worse, the Progenitors have been busy as well, preparing a list of experiments that requires the characters to act as their unwilling guinea pigs.



The Government

There are hidden organizations within the government, humans who know more than they should about what is really going on in the world. They, too, might find a mixture of willing monsters useful in their covert operations. After all, the supernatural powers of the new operatives can manage much more with less noise and no proof. Perhaps that annoying Third World dictator has finally gone too far and must be eliminated. Maybe the good congressman has been nosing around where he shouldn't and needs to disappear. Or worse, the time might finally be at hand to capture a group of the unnatural freaks for dissection and study.

Theme: Trust no one. There is no turning back from some paths. Once indoctrinated into the secret society of government espionage, the troupe cannot return to the life they once knew. Big Brother is watching you, and failure to comply with his demands is certain to lead to peril. The only escape is death.

Mood: Secrecy, stealth and perpetual danger are all key elements in a government chronicle. The troupe would constantly need to strive for cooperation and excellence, or risk death and worse at the hands of the enemy. Bureaucrats run even the most secretive operations, and crossing the wrong person's path could send the pack into a trap. The group might be used as a decoy, sent into dangerous territories and thrust into vicious battles simply to provide a single agent a means of escaping with important knowledge. Who is there to trust in the cutthroat world of international espionage?

Story Ideas:

- The government knows more than they will admit. In order to ensure the loyalty of the troupe, they have gathered all of the information they could (a substantial amount, to be sure) on the families and friends of the characters. Betrayal is certain to lead to sanctions being called and to the sudden disappearances of important people in the troupe's lives.

- The characters are all wanted by the government for crimes against the state. Evidence exists, both real and fabricated, that would place the troupe behind bars for life, unless they agree to serve the government as penance.

- Investigations into the paranormal are usually handled by the human agents, but matters change when the investigations require deep knowledge of the hidden machinations of the paranormals. Government dealings with the prince of a city or the head of a local cabal might best be handled by those familiar with the ways of the unnatural. Then there's the matter of that renegade Garou running amok in Seattle, the one who's been hunting down and killing US agents. What does he know? Where does he come from? Most important of all: who, or what, is he really after?



The Giovanni

The necromancers are outnumbered, and every little edge helps when push comes to shove. Enforcers who are paid top dollar for their loyalty are especially useful when they're blended together from different factions. It's hard watching over the criminal organizations when you are forced to sleep the day away. Few sleeping vampires could withstand a group of mages and werewolves. That little conflict with the Mafia might end faster if the outcast troupe could be convinced to handle the problem. With no connection to the Giovanni, even the worry of capture is eliminated. Who are these guys to know a Giovanni from a Tremere?

Theme: Everyone has a price, and everything is for sale. The Giovanni are willing to buy the loyalty of the troupe. But that loyalty must be complete, or the characters will not live long. Death, destruction, violence and pain surround the Giovanni, but so do wealth, honor and prestige. Are the characters willing to sacrifice everything they have in order to realize their dreams? Will the dreams be nothing more than nightmares? If so, how will the troupe escape with their lives from a clan that does not understand compassion for the enemy?

Mood: The life of a mercenary is filled with dangers, but the rewards can be substantial. Crime and punishment play heavily in a Giovanni chronicle. The Giovanni are shrewd and ruthless, but amazingly loyal to those they call their friends. A strong sense of family exists within the Giovanni clan, and that feeling is shared with confidants. But there is a price. There is always a price. Here the troupe can find the acceptance they long for, as long as they can keep their mouths shut and forget where the bodies are buried.

Story Ideas:

- The troupe is required to make a hit for the Giovanni. Unfortunately, the target of the hit is a very influential member of the Assamite Clan. The Assamites do not forgive, nor do they forget.
- The Sabbat are making a power-play against the Giovanni. As the bodyguards of the don, the characters must fight to preserve their employer. Failure would mean far worse than death, for the Giovanni can call the dead into their service or punish their souls for their carelessness.
- The Syndicate is trying to take over, and the characters must stop it. Unfortunately, the Syndicate has a few ties of their own with the Inquisition.



Pentex

So those pesky Garou want a fight, do they? Well, there are more ways to kill a werewolf than just fomori and silver. Besides, some of these guys can do things to help in other ways. Pentex would not necessarily use an outcast troupe only as an assault machine; information can be useful also.

Theme: The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Many among the Ronin do not forgive the tribes who've abandoned them any more than the tribes forgive their transgressions. If there is seemingly no hope of redemption, there is no reason to seek forgiveness. Anger is a bitter pill to swallow, and mercy is for the weak. The Wyrm rules Pentex and is always willing to find new pawns. What is to stop the Wyrm from using the troupe to its own ends?

Mood: Danger, rage, violence and vengeance are all integral to a Pentex chronicle. The Garou fight to win and play for keeps. There is no mercy for the servants of Pentex. The Apocalypse is all-encompassing, and Pentex is at the center of that battle. At what price survival?

Story Ideas:

- Perhaps the leaders of Pentex are weak, unable to stop the rampaging Garou from toppling their empire. New rulers, ones who understand the World of Darkness and the factions who fight against Pentex are needed. Are the characters strong enough to topple the present rulers from their thrones?
- The troupe might want a chance to stop the juggernaut from the inside. What better method of attack than a betrayal at a most crucial time? Can the characters resist the machinations of the Wyrm and maintain their own personal beliefs, or will they fall to the Wyrm's seduction and become all that they most hate?

Stretching the Boundaries

There is no reason to limit your list of enemies to those who would normally make themselves known in a World of Darkness setting. By the same token, there is no reason to limit the allies. If you and your troupe already know the

political structures involved in the Storyteller games, you should feel free to push the limits to — and beyond — the breaking point. The normal rules can and should still affect your outcast chronicle, but they should not limit it.

As with no other story in the World of Darkness, an outcast chronicle can reveal the darkest alliances of friend and foe alike. Is there a connection between the Technocracy's Syndicate and the Giovanni clan? Do the Shadow Lords have a connection to either group, and if so, just how are they tied together? Here is the chance to look into the closets of the established powers and find a few skeletons. For Caitiff, Hollower and Ronin alike, the secrets revealed could change their lives completely, for better or worse.

Do the Nosferatu work alongside the Black Spiral Dancers? Are the Venttrue and the Glass Walkers working hand in hand with the New World Order? Has Pentex allied with the gene-splicers of the Progenitors to create new fomori breeds? Alliances that could completely alter the balance of power might only be discovered by the outcast troupe with their knowledge of how these groups can work together. The long-standing mutual mistrust between the tribes, clans and Traditions works against the establishments, limiting what they can find out. The troupe could well save their world from a terrible threat or join with the collaborators and bring an end to the groups who betrayed them. A chance at redemption, perhaps, or a chance at sweet revenge.

Letting in the Darkness

The Storyteller games all offer a darker, more sinister counterpart for characters to face off against. More than just an enemy to fight, these doppelgangers are a dark reflection of what the characters strive to become. In any chronicle, these Black Spiral Dancers, Sabbat and Nephandi have their place. But in an outcast chronicle, their roles become even greater. These "dark reflections" are everything a character should fight against, but they are also the easy way out of a bad situation.

Make the characters suffer for their morals. Here is a chance to stretch your imagination to the maximum.

Theme: The darker side of the World of Darkness offers far more than just acceptance; it offers power and a chance at revenge. The theme here is simple enough: the devil you know is better than the devils that await you. The dark-siders are always there, waiting for a chance to bring the lost ones over to their way of thinking. Are the characters strong enough to resist the temptation? Or will they fall to the warm, hollow promises of their own inner darkness?

Mood: The mood of a strong Dark Reflections chronicle is one of despair and temptation. The solitude of the characters should be emphasized, as should the shining ray of hope offered by the vile counterparts to all that the characters hold sacred.

Despite the numerous flaws that each clan, Tradition and tribe suffers from, they all have their good points as well. They all fight for the specific goals of their people. The dark reflections fight for the exact opposite in most cases. However, despite the radical change of views, they are still all one people. The Sabbat fights against the Camarilla's political beliefs, but they are vampires just the same. The Black Spiral Dancers are still Garou, they just follow a different faction of the Triad. Just as with all mages, the Nephandi strive to make the world a better place, but their dreams of a superior world are radically different from most.

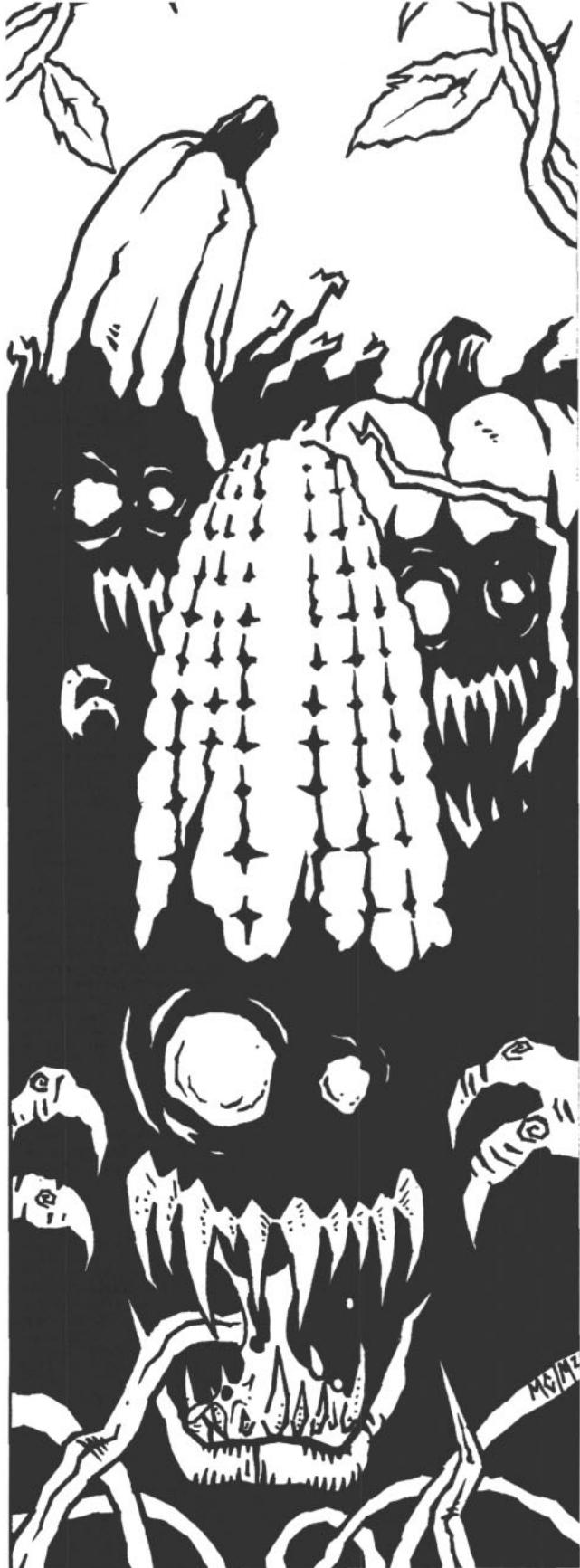
These factions would love nothing more than to bring the outcasts over to their side of the fence. None of them are mindless; none of them feel that everything opposed to them should die. At least, not until their opponents have been given a proper recruiting speech. Members of these dark factions have all made their decisions (or had the decisions made for them), and they all believe their way is best. They also believe in teaching their less-enlightened peers to learn more about life on the other side of the fence before judging too harshly. Just as they can be destructive, the dark-siders can be seductive. Emphasize the seduction.

When all others are ignoring the outcasts, the darker powers should be trying harder than ever to woo them over. They may never get a better chance. Use the dark-siders, and use them well. They should not be designed only for killing.

Of course, if the seduction method fails, none of these groups are opposed to a little violence to get their point across....

Story Ideas:

- The troupe is offered a chance to join with their dark counterparts. Perhaps they plan to betray them once enlisted. But their dark reflections are better prepared than they thought. Creation Rites, the Black Spiral Labyrinth or the Caul wait just around the corner. Is there escape? If they fail in their attempts, how will they find redemption?
- The characters willingly join their dark brethren, only to discover too late that they are wanted in spirit only. The sacrifice is to take place the following night. How will they escape from the prison that holds them? Once away, who will they turn to for help, especially when there was a witness to their betrayal?



Alternate Settings

The Broken Cycle

The problem with being accepted by a faction in the World of Darkness is simple: Tunnel vision inevitably follows. Most tribes and clans accept that their way is the best. The Get of Fenris don't think they're right, they know it. The same applies to the Sons of Ether and the Ventre. But outsiders have the chance to gain a fresh perspective, one not bogged down by the opinions of their peers. A chronicle devoted to uniting all of the tribes, clans or Traditions would prove exceedingly challenging, not only for the players, but for the Storyteller as well.

Still, the rewards could prove immense. The Apocalypse, Gehenna and an end to the Ascension Wars would make for an amazing backdrop to the story. The last days are upon all of the races that share this world. Perhaps the only real chance they have is to unite forces against the powers working against them. But convincing enemies who have battled one another for centuries would take heroes of truly epic proportions. Is your troupe up to the task? For that matter, are you?

The Broken Cycle would have to be very dark indeed. The remaining numbers of Garou would be minimal, and the Kindred left standing would either be very strong or running for dear life from the arisen Antediluvians. The Technocracy has been winning the Ascension War for the last century, forcing the belief in technology upon the masses and driving the few remaining Tradition mages into the shadows. But in the final days, how many Tradition mages would still be around? Who would lead them? Only the strongest and wisest could hope to pull salvation from the ruins of their dreams. A grimmer and more powerful story would be hard to build.

Theme: Rebirth is the main theme of the Broken Cycle. Just as many legendary heroes have been forced to sacrifice all for their beliefs, the characters must make the greatest decision ever faced in their lives. Can they hope to change the ways of the Garou, the Kindred and the Traditions? Is there still time to become the leaders they must, even if they lead only in spirit? What efforts must they face in order to unite the forces that stand between the Apocalypse and salvation? Even if they survive the final war, are they strong enough to lead their forces into a golden era? The Broken Cycle chronicle is above all else, an epic saga of the last days.

Mood: The Broken Cycle chronicle should offer hope for the outcast. Here is a chance to make a difference, a final attempt to teach the powers that be the error of their ways. However, just as hope is offered, so too is despair. Great sacrifices are needed to sway the establishment. Are the characters willing to make the effort and change the ways of the world around them?

Story Ideas:

The final days have arrived, and the Antediluvians have arisen. The Wyrm devours all it sees in an orgy of mindless destruction. The Traditions have fallen. The humans fight among themselves, preparing their ultimate weapons for use.

In this diseased, failing world, the troupe must unify the forces that remain and bring about the fall of all that is evil. Finding the remaining paranormals is hard enough, but bringing them together as a unit requires leadership skills and the strength of will to bring the fading heroes of the past back to their formal glory.

A single powerful talisman, created by the greatest mages and Garou elders lies hidden, waiting to be claimed and used in battle against the darkness. The characters must find that talisman, but to do so they must also win a race against the forces brought to bear against them. They must win a final race against time.

The Fires of the Inquisition

Turning back the clock can make for just as interesting a challenge. When the Inquisition was at its height, destroying supernaturals wherever they were found, the Apocalypse was still a long way off, the anarchs were still fighting against their elders in a violent, bloody war, and the Traditions were just being formed. Consider an outcast chronicle where the characters must deal with the violent upheavals of everything that was accepted.

The mortals of the Middle Ages who knew of the creatures that plagued their world fought back. The 13 tribes were not as tolerant then as they are now; the Garou still had enough members to permit them the luxury of exterminating the weak and foolish among them. What these days results in banishment from the tribe would likely have ended with a massive hunt. The Kindred clans fought bitterly to retain control of what had always been theirs and was now being taken away. Caitiff were few, and those who were identified were not tolerated. The best way to handle the risk they caused was to simply kill them. Orphan mages were rarer then and were perceived as a threat to the fledgling Traditions. The Order of Reason wanted an end to

the old ways and used the Inquisition to their own ends. The politics of the supernaturals were just as convoluted then as they are today and twice as deadly.

Theme: From the ashes of destruction grow the seeds of the future. A story revolving around the changes brought about by the Inquisition or even about how a handful of outcasts fought back against the Church and their own kind cannot help but be powerful. The future is a dark place, but the characters have a chance to bring forth positive change, to reshape the future in their own image, if they have the strength and conviction to do so.

Mood: An outcast chronicle set during the Inquisition would face greater risks than are now present, but the potential rewards would be so much higher. The Anarch Wars were violent. Every clan fought against itself and each other. A Caitiff placed in such times could manage the unthinkable if she moved carefully enough. An Orphan mage could become an integral player in how the Traditions were formed, and a daring enough Ronin could change the ways in which the tribes dealt with humans and with each other. Here is a chance to reshape the world or die trying.

Story Ideas:

- The characters are each captured by the Inquisition and thrown into dungeons meant to hold the supernatural “demons” the Church seeks to destroy. Each is held by bonds designed to resist their powers and can potentially help the others to escape. With the troupe are several other victims of the Inquisition. Some would aid the characters, others would see them destroyed in the hopes of saving themselves for another night. Who can the characters trust?

- The Cabal of Pure Thought has joined with the Inquisition, and the two powerful forces have grown exponentially. Can the troupe break this alliance before the weak trust established between the two factions can grow too strong?

- Having learned of the Inquisition’s plans, the armies of the Garou prepare to stand against the humans in a massive assault. However, the knowledge they have been given is a lie; the trusted ally who brought the message has betrayed them all. Can the characters gather the evidence they need to convince the elders and reveal the truth before it is too late?

- The anarchs are on the move, and the most powerful Kindred are looking for a few good agents to infiltrate the upstarts. Are the characters up to the task? Or will they fall in with the angry neonate mobs and bring down the arrogant rulers who are too foolish to surrender their power?

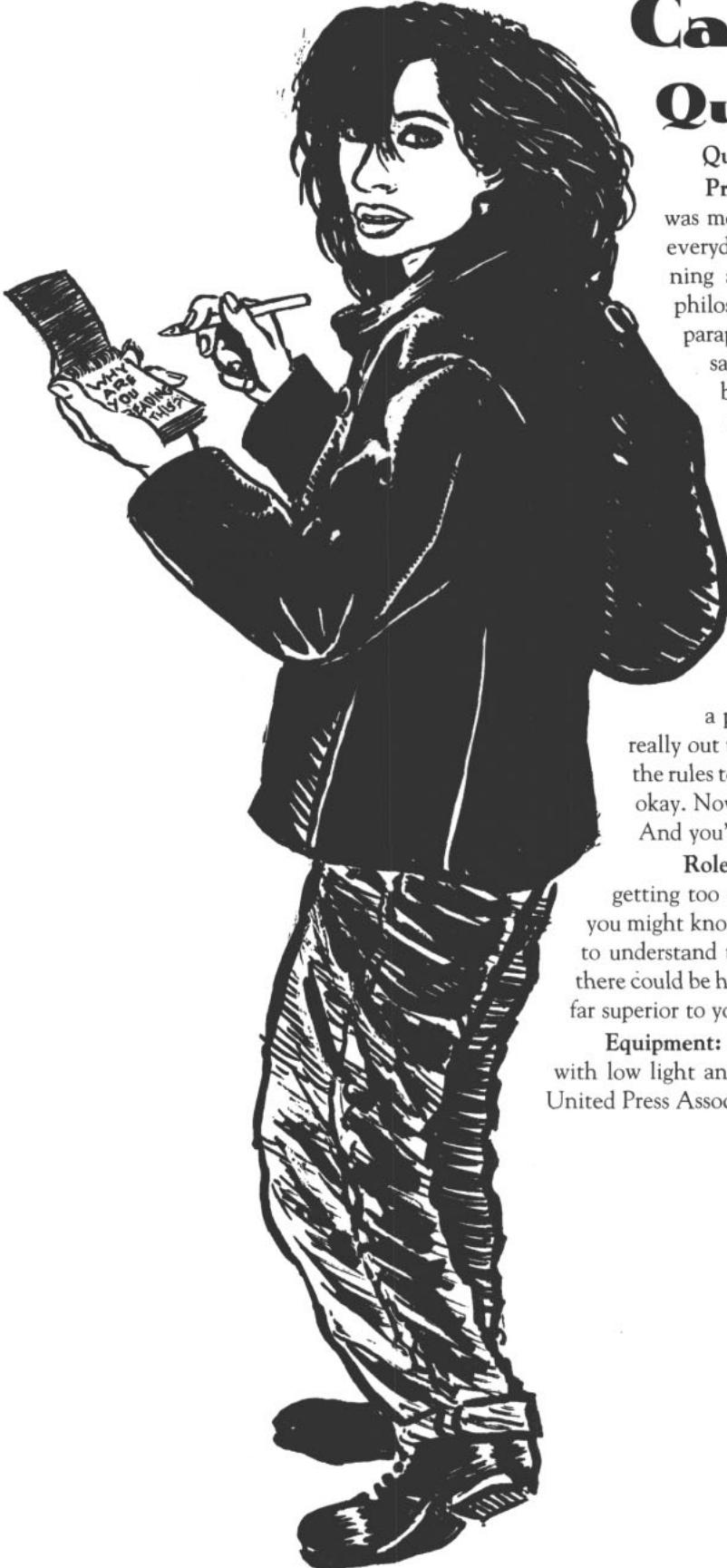


Appendix: Misfits

*So celebrate while you still can
'Cause any second it may end
And when it's over, said and done
Better that you had some fun*
— Oingo Boingo, "No One Lives Forever"

Many are the reasons an outcast walks alone. Caitiff are born to their outsider status. Garou usually earn it through breaking one of the seemingly draconian laws of their Litany, or, less often, they choose to leave. The Hollow Ones' very natures offend the more established Traditions, since they somehow represent a theoretical wild card no one wants to account for.

So, you're alone. Deal with it. Maybe... just maybe... those other loners are thinking what you're thinking. That you should get together. You know, mutual protection and all that. The downtrodden need gangs. So what if one of your fellow gangmembers has fleas? Heck, you stink of spilt blood and murder yourself. There's nothing like being on the outside to teach you humility and cooperation with others of your kind. The lonely kind, that is.



Caitiff Questioner

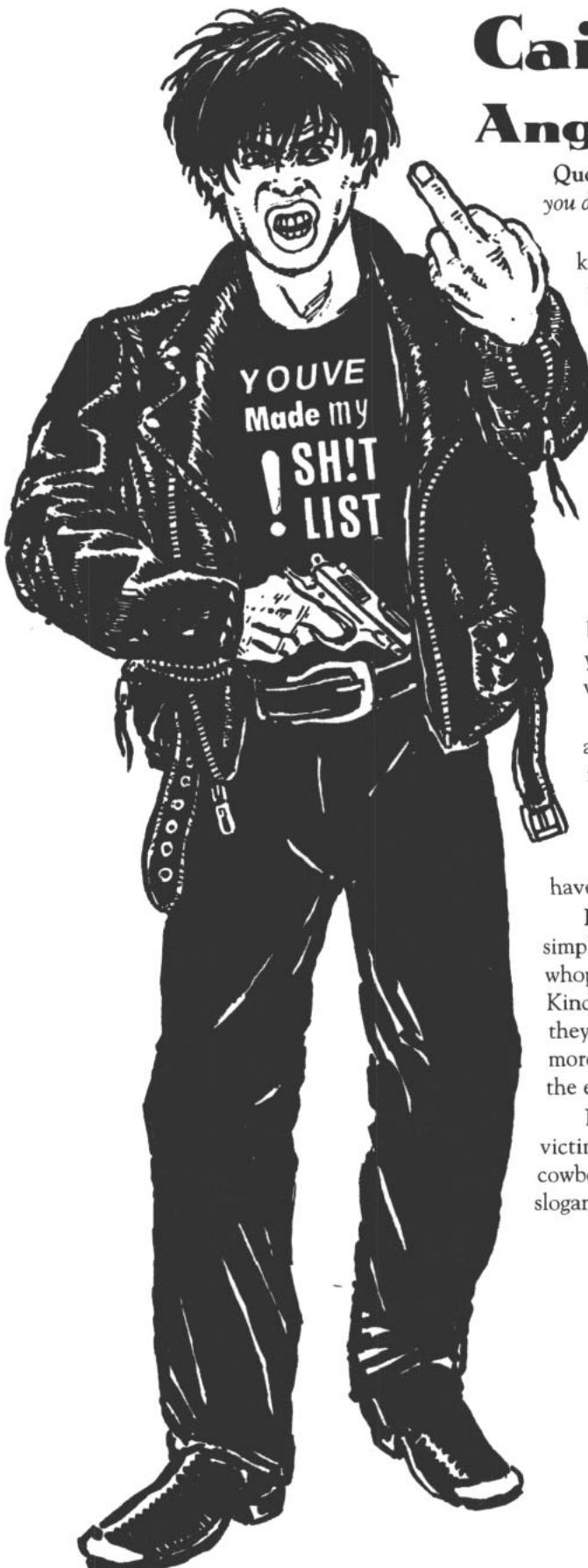
Quote: Are you sure about what you saw?

Prelude: All of your life, you wanted to believe there was more to reality than just what could be seen in the everyday world. You spent most of your childhood running around with your nose in a book of New Age philosophy or surrounded by enough parapsychological paraphernalia to make your parents worry about your sanity. Then you went to college and learned how to best apply your hobbies to your career — you became a journalist. You spent most of your time on the street, tracking down stories and seeking to gain more clues about the supernatural entities you were certain existed. One night, you got too close for someone's comfort. When you recovered from the Embrace, the only warning you received from the shadowy figure was to stay out of the sunlight. Now you are on your own in a more-than-everyday world.

Concept: Insatiable curiosity has always been a part of your life. Learning the truth about what is really out there matters the most to you. If you have to break the rules to discover the answers to your questions, then that's okay. Now you've got a chance to learn everything there is. And you've got enough time to make sure you get it right.

Roleplaying Hints: Be friendly, but keep yourself from getting too close to anyone. Remember that everyone around you might know something you need to know if you're ever going to understand the world around you. You're a vampire now, but there could be hundreds of different creatures out there with powers far superior to your own.

Equipment: Dictation recorder, notepad, pencils, two cameras with low light and bright light speed film, and the ever-important United Press Association card.



Caitiff Angry Victim

Quote: Yeah, I remember you. Do I ever. And you're going to regret what you did to me then. You don't remember? Well, I do. Do I ever...

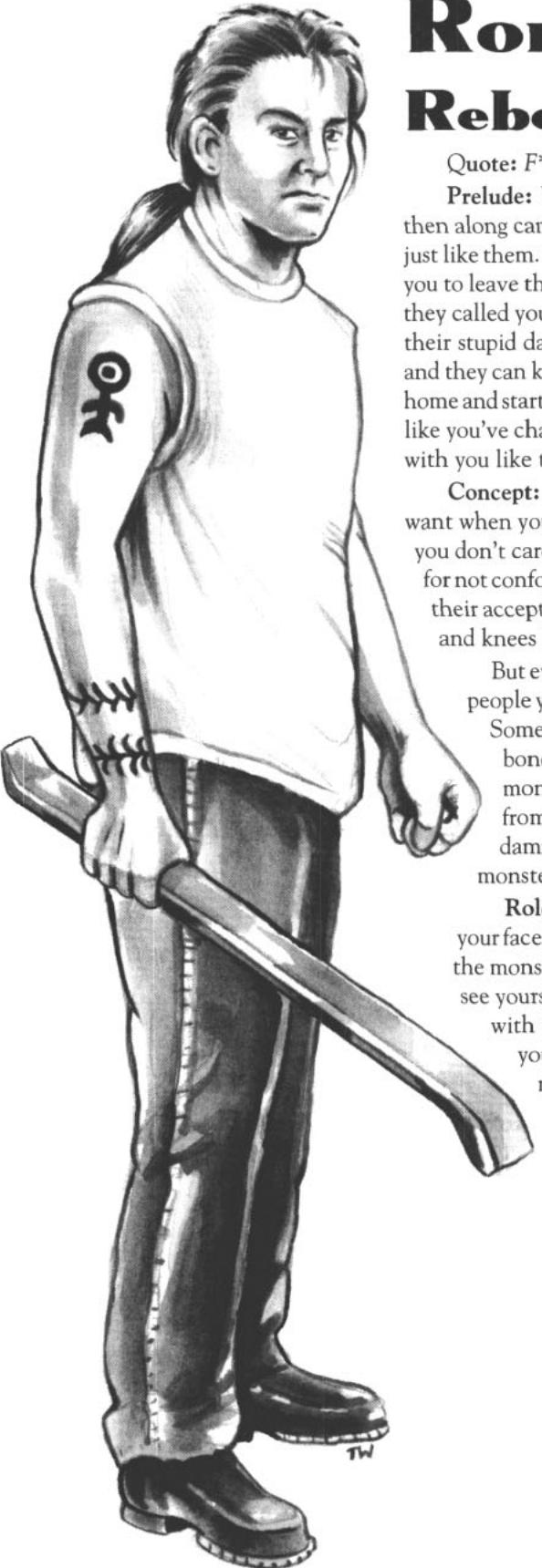
Prelude: You've been the victim. At least, that's what you keep telling yourself. In school, you were always picked last for team sports and you were always the first to get picked on. You spent most of your years with your head tucked firmly between your shoulders and your eyes wary for the next potential attacker. You couldn't have made it easier for the bullies if you'd had 'Human Target' tattooed on your forehead.

When you entered the work-force, you worked as harder than anyone else but always managed to miss out on the rare opportunities to advance. Just when you finally escaped on vacation, you were attacked. It wasn't just an Embrace though; it was a vicious rape. Whoever did this to you ran. All you could see was a figure with long black hair. But you'll find the responsible party, and you'll have your revenge. This is just the beginning. You can feel the power that fuels you with every step you take, and the list of people you owe for past humiliations is very long indeed.

Concept: You never intend to take crap off anyone ever again. Those days are in the past. You can now make them all pay for what they did to you. And that's just what you intend to do. Bobby Finkenbinder bloodied your nose in the fifth grade, and you know where he lives. And Troy Monroe who stuck your head in the school toilet once. Oh, yes, they'll all get what they have coming. And they'll get it in spades!

Roleplaying Hints: You don't back down from fights. It's that simple. If a mortal wants to try his luck against you, he'll get a whopping hospital bill for his trouble. Still, some of those other Kindred look sort of mean, so you don't want to push them too far. If they start something, be ready to retaliate or run, whichever makes more sense. Never let them see you sweat, and always look them in the eyes. Also, smile. It makes them wonder what you're thinking.

Equipment: .44 Magnum, small note pad with a list of future victims, cool leather jacket like you never had when you were alive, cowboy boots with steel toes, numerous black T-shirts with offensive slogans.



Ronin Garou

Rebel

*Quote: F*** your damn rules. And while you're at it, f*** you, too!*

Prelude: You never wanted this. You just wanted to be left alone. And then along came the werewolves, taking you from your home and making you just like them. They wanted you to fight the Wyrm and its spawn. They wanted you to leave the city behind and fight their stupid wars for them. All the while they called you names and tried to make you live off the land and be one with their stupid damned earth-goddess. Well, they can shove their damn Wyrm, and they can keep their precious laws to themselves. All you want is to go back home and start over with your friends. You just wish everyone would stop acting like you've changed. You don't feel any different, so why doesn't anyone hang with you like they used to?

Concept: You live in the city, and you love the freedom to do what you want when you want. Being a werewolf is okay — it has its advantages — but you don't care if you never see the woods again. Fine, so they kicked you out for not conforming, but that never mattered to you anyway. You didn't ask for their acceptance, and you wouldn't want it if they came back on their hands and knees begging.

But everything has changed. People act like they're scared of you, even people you'd never consider hurting. Dammit, but that makes you angry!

Sometimes you could just rip their f***ing throats out and break their bones into so much powder. But that's not you talking, it's the monster you hide inside of you. It's the werewolf that wants to be free from the city and to run in the woods. You must fight against those damned urges, because they're nothing but trouble. You can deny the monster. You're strong enough to do that. Aren't you?

Roleplaying Hints: You're as sweet as honey until someone gets in your face — or worse, ignores you. Never let a person get too close, because the monster inside of you wants out, and it might want to hurt them. You see yourself as the original tragic hero; you want only to be left in peace with the humans you've known all of your life. But you believe that you're cursed by the powers you now have. Whenever the full moon rises, you feel the overwhelming need to change.

Equipment: Bad attitude, street smarts, whatever money you could scrounge up and the knife in your pocket.

RONIN

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: HOMID
Auspice: RAGABASH
Former Tribe: STARGAZER

Pack Totem:
Concept: REBEL
Battle Scars:

Attributes

Social

Mental

Physical
Strength _____ ●●●○○
Dexterity _____ ●●○○○
Stamina _____ ●●●○○

Charisma _____ ●●○○○
Manipulation _____ ●●○○○
Appearance _____ ●●○○○

Perception _____ ●●●○○
Intelligence _____ ●●●○○
Wits _____ ●●●○○

Talents

Alertness _____ ●●●○○
Athletics _____ ●●○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○
Empathy _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ●●○○○
Intimidation _____ ●○○○○
Primal-Urgue _____ ●●●○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

Animal Ken _____ ●●○○○
Drive _____ ●○○○○
Etiquette _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Melee _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ○○○○○
Performance _____ ○○○○○
Repair _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ●●○○○
Survival _____ ●●●○○

Abilities

Skills

Knowledge

Computer _____ ○○○○○
Enigmas _____ ●●○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Law _____ ●○○○○
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○
Politics _____ ○○○○○
Rituals _____ ●●○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Gifts

Gifts

Backgrounds
CONTACTS _____ ●●○○○
PAST LIFE _____ ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

OPEN SEAL
SENSE WYRM
SMELL OF MAN

Renown

Rage

Health

Glory

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Honor

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Wisdom

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Rank

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Gnosis

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Bruised

Hurt

-1

Injured

-1

Wounded

-2

Mauled

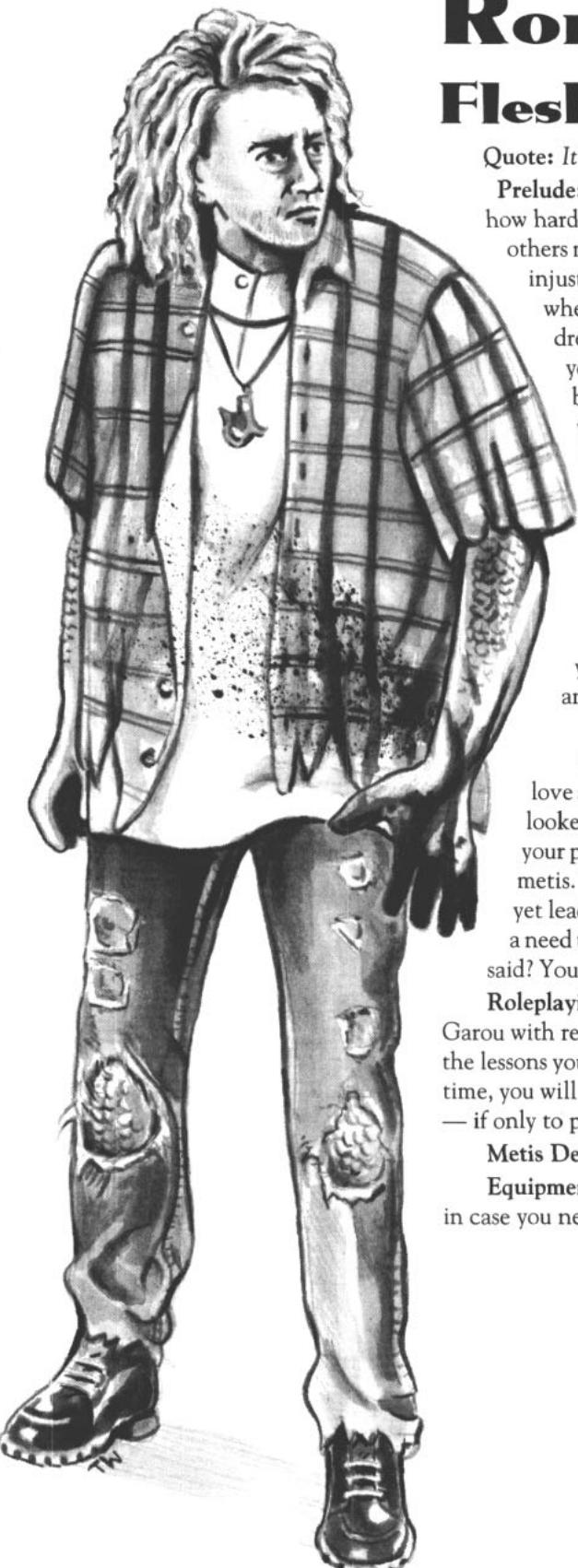
-2

Crippled

-5

Incapacitated

Experience



Ronin Garou

Flesh-Eater

Quote: It's not my fault!

Prelude: You never wanted anything but to be accepted. But no matter how hard you tried, it was never enough for the rest of the tribe. When others managed less, they were given greater rewards. Your anger at the injustice got kind of hard to control. You had dreams of a distant past when you were accepted not only as an equal, but as a leader. But the dreams only made matters worse. Three times, you woke from what you thought was a solid sleep only to find yourself miles from your bed. The last time it happened, you had the taste of raw meat in your mouth and your hands were stained with blood. What's worse, you've developed a passion for the taste.

Only a few days ago, an elder caught you consuming the remains of a hitchhiker. And that was the end of it. Your life among the Garou, that is. Consuming the flesh of humans was against the Litany. They no longer wanted you, claiming you were Wyrm-tainted. You cried out, claiming that you didn't do these things. It's these dreams you've been having. They said you could come back when you've banished your inner demons and cleansed your soul.

Yeah, right. You don't even know where to start.

Concept: Your love of Gaia is very sincere; you were raised to love and honor Her. But the same people who raised you have always looked down on you, considered you less than Garou simply because your parents committed an incestuous act. Yeah, that's right. You're a metis. You seek the truth behind your dreams, which seem so glorious yet lead you to bestial acts. You have no idea why you have developed a need to hunt and kill humans. Are you really Wyrm-tainted, like they said? You know the answer is in your dreams.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a metis and a Ronin as well. But treat the Garou with respect, because if you don't, they will surely kill you. Remember the lessons you were taught, and keep to the path of righteousness. Perhaps in time, you will come to accept your fate. But for now you must act with honor — if only to prove your innocence to yourself.

Metis Deformity: Madness

Equipment: Oak staff, human clothes, a hunting knife and 20 dollars, just in case you need to visit the scabs.



Hollow One Goth Wannabe

Quote: Yeah? Well, you can shove your Conventions straight up your crusty...

Prelude: For the last three years, you were certain that you'd lost your mind. When things kept happening around you — strange things, like that rain of frogs on the beach — you decided to finally look into the matter more seriously. Then your shadow started explaining what was going on; you figured you'd better listen. Okay, so you're a mage. Now if you could just be as brave and courageous as all the wizards in the fantasy books, you'd be happy. You thought about trying to join with one of the Traditions, but they all want to tell you what you can and can't do. You'd rather have the freedom to make your own choices. Lately, you've been hanging with a group of Hollow Ones and doing your best to imitate their style. They sneer at you past their clove cigarettes, and their music really isn't what you want to listen to, but it's better than being alone.

Concept: You'd love to be a hero or a knight in shining armor, but you have this intolerance to pain that keeps getting in the way. You're really not certain if the Hollow Ones are the best option, but they'll do for now. It took a while to ingratiate yourself with them, but you've managed. Well, at least they don't ignore you completely anymore.

Roleplaying Hints: The best defense is a good offense, so you've made an art of being obnoxious and pushy. You have trouble trusting anyone, even the people you're hanging around with, but you still hate being alone, because that's when your shadow starts talking again. Oh, sure, you realize it's not really your shadow, it's your Avatar. But just the same...

Equipment: A large collection of knickknacks, several counter-culture magazines, one ring for every finger, brass knuckles and a well-used plastic ray gun that really works. (Your focus.)



Hollow One

Manipulative Friend

Quote: Listen, I helped you. Now I need you to help me.

Prelude: You have always worked at making the world fit with your desires. Since you Awakened, you've made it an art form. Life is too easy, and the only way you've found to make it more interesting is to play mind-games with the people you meet. You toyed with joining a few of the Traditions, but none of them had the right mentality (your mentality,) and they all expected you to work for what you want. At least the ones that would give you the time of day. You really think the Euthanatos are something special, but they've refused you entry into the chantry time and time again. You like the Cult of Ecstasy okay, but they're into some stuff that you're afraid to try, and you don't want to look silly in front of them.

Concept: You are a natural-born leader, at least in your own eyes. But you know all too well that being in the limelight would cause you too much trouble. It's better to let someone else get the glory just so long as the material rewards are all yours. You know that there is more to life than what you already have, and you know how to get it, too. But the rules of mage society are complex, and you have never been one to simply break the rules. Bend them? Yes. Break them? No.

Roleplaying Hints: It's not the kill that makes life worth living, it's the thrill of the chase. You are everybody's friend and nobody's enemy. You know better than to pit friends against each other; that can backfire too easily. You prefer to simply make yourself so important to everyone that they come to you for aid and advice regularly. You never mind helping people, but you only help them as long as they can help you. Smile, be friendly. Never lose your temper with your associates, because you must be perceived as better than everyone else. And you must also appear humble before your peers.

Equipment: Pack of clove cigarettes, wad of money that you will gladly loan out, all the latest CDs and an assortment of concert tickets for every show worth mentioning.

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PRINTED IN CANADA